

RELATIONSHIP THEOLOGY: A MODEL FOR PRODUCING
HEALTHY MARRIAGES IN THE AFRICAN
AMERICAN CONTEXT

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ABSTRACT

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by

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The purpose of this project was to implement a biblically-based premarital counseling model for engaged couples at the John Wesley African Methodist Episcopal Zion Church in Baltimore, Maryland, in an effort to stem the tide of high divorce rates and low marriage rates among African Americans. The results of pre-post tests, as well as group sessions, indicated that participants' understanding of and attitudes about marital relationships were enhanced. As a result, the church held a marriage consecration service and also was selected to participate in a Peer Learning Network designed to promote healthy relationships among low-income families.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

To God be the glory, for the great things He has done. First of all, I thank my Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ, for leading and guiding me through this process. Second, I thank Dr. Ricky Woods and Dr. Terry Thomas for helping me to “trust the process,” and for leading by example. Third, I am grateful to my “sister-cousins” and fellow UTS graduates, the Rt. Rev. Dr. Vashti Murphy McKenzie and the Rev. Dr. Marie Murphy Braxton, who encouraged me along the way; to my peers in the Woods-Thomas group (a special thanks to Dr. David Green and Elder Simone Gibson); and, to my many other colleagues in ministry, including: Dr. Ray Winbush, Dr. Rita J. Colbert, Dr. Bob Brantley, Dr. A. Qismat Alim, Dr. Yvonne Bronner, Rev. Dr. Alphonse Allen, Dr. Patricia Johnson and soon-to-be Dr. Pamela Love, for their assistance. Last, but not least, I thank every member of the John Wesley A.M.E. Zion Church—especially Nicole Batey, Diada McCray, Kevin Peck, Ella Pitts, and Allison Richards—for your love, prayers, patience and support. A special thanks to the couples who participated in this project, and to the RELATE Institute for granting permission to use the results of their on-line questionnaires.

DEDICATION

To my husband, Andre: Thank you for more than 30 years of love and happiness.

To my parents, children, grandchildren and siblings: Thank you for your love and support. May the Lord continue to bless you and keep you, in His care.

ABBREVIATIONS

A.M.E.	African Methodist Episcopal
BYU	Brigham Young University
CFWD	Center for Fathers, Families and Workforce Development
KJV	King James Version
NKJV	New King James Version
UTS	United Theological Seminary
Y.E.S.	Youth Entertainment Studios

INTRODUCTION

Nearly all wedding ceremonies in the Christian Church begin with the well-known words:

DEARLY BELOVED: We are gathered together here in the sight of God and in the presence of these witnesses, to join together this man and woman in holy matrimony; which is an honorable estate, instituted of God in the time of man's innocency, signifying unto us the mystical union that is between Christ and his Church; which holy estate he adorned and beautified by his presence and first miracle that he wrought in Cana of Galilee, and is commended of St. Paul to be honorable among all men; therefore, it is not, by any, to be entered into unadvisedly, but reverently discreetly, and in the fear of God, into which holy estate these two persons present come now to be joined. Therefore, if any person can show just cause why they may not lawfully be joined together let them now speak, or else forever hold their peace.¹

While the ceremony is usually over in an hour or less, it is the hope of the couple, as well as those assembled, that the marriage will last for a lifetime. Unfortunately, many couples spend more time on wedding preparations than they do on preparing for healthy, stable, long-lasting, satisfying marriages. According to the United States Department of Health and Human Services' Administration for Families and Children:

- Black males and females are more likely to be unmarried than whites, Hispanics or American Indians;
- Among married black individuals, a greater percentage is living apart from their spouses than among married white and Asian individuals;
- Single male headed families are slightly more likely in black homes than in white family homes;

¹*The Book of Discipline of the African Methodist Episcopal Zion Church* (Charlotte, NC: The A.M.E. Zion Publishing House, 2000), 349.

- Single female headed families are far more likely in black homes than in all other group's homes;
- Only 44.9% of black householders in family households live with a spouse; and,
- Unmarried black women constitute a majority of childbearing black women and the rate of out of wedlock childbearing is increasing.²

These statistics are a cause for concern. To address these issues, many organizations, including the Federal Government, have begun *Healthy Marriage Initiatives* and the last Sunday in March has been designated as *Black Marriage Day*.³ However, even when people do get married, marriage preparation often is woefully inadequate. The purpose of this research project is to develop and implement a model based on relationship theology that is designed to produce stronger marriages in the African American context.

Chapter One of this document details the ministry focus which includes the researcher's spiritual journey and context. The researcher also presents an overview of the ministry problem. In Chapter Two, the researcher provides a review of the literature from a variety of perspectives. Special attention is paid to literature relative to the ministry focus. Chapter Three provides the theoretical foundation for this project. As such, the researcher explores historical, theological and biblical constructs in support of the ministry model. Chapter Four outlines the design of the research methodology used in this project. The chapter includes the hypothesis, the intervention, the research design, the measurement and the instrumentation. In Chapter Five, the researcher discusses the results of the field experience and an analysis of the data collected. The final chapter of

² "What is the African American Healthy Marriage Initiative?" (Washington, D.C. : The U.S. Department of Health and Human Services), available <http://www.acf.hhs.gov/healthymarriage/aa_hmi/AAHMI.html> (31 January 2006).

³ "Black Marriage Day," available <<http://www.blackmarriageday.com>> (31 January 2006).

this project, Chapter Six, gives the researcher's reflections, summary and conclusions. It is this researcher's hope that, as a result of this project, clergy and lay leaders will have a renewed appreciation for and a determination to implement comprehensive, biblically-based marriage preparation ministries in their churches.

CHAPTER ONE

MINISTRY FOCUS

“It’s all about relationships” is an oft-quipped phrase used to describe the interaction and association between two or more persons. The most important and intriguing human relationships involve a person’s relationship to God and to each other within a marriage. In today’s ever changing culture, the definition of marriage is being debated from kitchen tables to the halls of Congress. Some believe that the legal definition of marriage should extend to any couple desiring to be united in wedlock, regardless of sexual orientation. However, for the purposes and implications of this project, a marriage is defined as a legally sanctioned, biblically-based union between one man and one woman. As such, it is not this researcher’s intent for the results and conclusions of this project to extend to same sex unions or domestic partnerships.

Sadly, many people marry without a clear understanding of what it takes to maintain a stable and satisfying marital relationship that honors both God and one’s husband or wife. While most couples seek to be married by a clergy person, many clergy persons lack either the tools or the time to conduct in-depth premarital counseling. This project combines a proven, comprehensive on-line premarital questionnaire with a premarital counseling curriculum that will be invaluable to clergy, as they help engaged couples prepare for one of the most important relationships of their lives.

The Spiritual Journey

The researcher, the oldest of three, was 12 years old when her parents divorced. The year was 1959 and most of her friends and relatives had a Mom and a Dad at home. Television shows like “Ozzie and Harriett,” “Father Knows Best,” and “Leave it to Beaver” influenced her concept of a wholesome and happy family. She often wondered what it would have been like to grow up in a two-parent family. This curiosity was fueled primarily by her mother’s engaging stories about how her parents worked together to raise five girls in “that big old house in Morgan Park” (named as such, because of its proximity to Baltimore’s Morgan State College—now University). Her mother also shared how hard it was to be a single parent, and how she worked two jobs so that her three children could go to college. Her Mom took the family to St. James Episcopal Church in Baltimore, Maryland every Sunday and made sure that the children were involved in the life of the church. Although her Dad was on the road “traveling” during most of the researcher’s adolescent years, she and her siblings spent time with him during the summer months. His family (mother and siblings) kept in close contact with the researcher and her two younger siblings.

At age 18, the researcher married her high school sweetheart. The marriage ceremony was performed by a Justice of the Peace in Hagerstown, Maryland. The couple had one son, but divorced in 1969 when the child was two years old. This was also the year that the researcher graduated from Morgan State College, where her paternal grandfather served as chairman of the Board of Trustees.

Five years later, after a short four month courtship, the researcher married her current husband. Prior to the wedding, an Episcopal priest conducted two premarital

counseling sessions consisting of heartfelt advice for the wife: "Make sure that your husband always has a hot meal" and "Keep yourself up." That was it! He then went over the details of the ceremony, asked if there were any questions and said, "See you at the wedding." Of course, it was not long before the couple discovered that marriage was much more than "eating" and "keeping yourself up." Although the newlyweds began their married life together without the benefit of either extensive premarital counseling or church membership, they were determined to make their marriage work. Their blended family included her son by her first husband and his son from a previous relationship. The couple had a daughter in 1976, and adopted another son a few years later.

In 1983, at the insistence of their then six year old daughter, the family joined the Pennsylvania Avenue A.M.E. Zion Church in Baltimore—the home church of the researcher's husband and his family. The church was a medium-sized, traditional "Methodist" church. The Sunday Morning worship services followed the prescribed order, as outlined in the A.M.E. Zion *Book of Discipline* as did most, if not all, of the lay organizations. There were several divorced persons in the church and many of the younger couples appeared to be having marital struggles. While engaged couples went through premarital counseling at the church, most reported that the sessions were limited in length and content.

The researcher left the Pennsylvania Avenue A.M.E. Zion Church (without her husband) three years later to become a founding member of a non-denominational church in Baltimore City. Her daughter and oldest son also joined this new fellowship, while her husband and their youngest son stayed at his family's church. The middle son was living with his biological mother at the time, and attended a Baptist church across town.

Initially, the split in the family's place of worship caused a great deal of tension in the researcher's marriage. Her husband said that, while he understood her desire and respected her right to go to another church, he was unhappy that she was not staying at *his* family's church—especially since he held a leadership position at the church. For seven years, the researcher worshipped at the non-denominational church where she accepted her call to preach and was later ordained. In addition to her preaching and teaching responsibilities, she counseled married couples on a regular basis. She also enrolled in The Ecumenical Institute of St. Mary's Seminary and University in Baltimore to pursue a master's degree in theology. Half-way through the St. Mary's program, she transferred to Loyola College of Maryland, earned a master's degree in pastoral counseling and successfully passed the National Counselor Exam (NCE).¹ On a part time basis, the researcher served as a pastoral counselor in a privately owned, local Christian counseling practice where she specialized in counseling engaged and married couples.

Six weeks before her seventh anniversary at the new church, the researcher clearly believed that the Lord was saying, "Go back and worship with your husband. You've been teaching others about how to have a healthy marriage, and it's time for you to go back. You're constantly telling other couples about the value of praying and worshipping together – now it's time for you to practice what you preach."

Even though this was not what her flesh wanted to do—she was content where she was—she knew it was God speaking to her. For a few weeks, she debated with God: "God, my pastor needs me; the people depend on me; the A.M.E. Zion Church is too stuffy and traditional; I really don't feel like going through all the motions and antics that so many complain about when they go into ministry there!"

¹ Administered by the National Board of Certified Counselors (NBCC), Greensboro, N.C.

After listening to the researcher snivel and whine, God finally said, “Look, I called you into ministry. Who are you to say where I want to plant you? I am a God of order, process and time. You are out of order with your complaining. I’ve matured you in the process, and now it’s time.” So, with her husband at her side, the researcher went first to her pastor (of the non-denominational church) and then to his pastor (who had been appointed four years prior, and did not know the researcher). During their meeting, her husband’s pastor welcomed the researcher to their fellowship and to the ministerial staff. In fact, the researcher rejoined the Pennsylvania Avenue A.M.E. Zion church the first Sunday in July 1996—exactly seven years from the date she left. She was admitted to the Philadelphia and Baltimore Conference of the denomination on credentials and acknowledged as an ordained deacon in the church. Two years later, she received her “Elders Orders.”

In September, 2002, six years after returning to Pennsylvania Avenue A.M.E. Zion Church in West Baltimore, the researcher was assigned as senior pastor of the John Wesley A.M.E. Zion Church in East Baltimore which is in a poverty-stricken inner city neighborhood, two blocks from the famed Johns Hopkins Hospital.

The Context

Baltimore City

Since 1980, the predominant racial group in Baltimore City has been African American. Although the percentage of African Americans has increased from 59.1% to 64.3%, the actual number of African Americans living in Baltimore City has decreased due to the migration to nearby Baltimore County. Whites make up 31.6% of the

population which is a decrease of nearly 30 %. Asians are 1.6% of the total population, while Latinos and Native Americans constitute the remaining percentage. African Americans are 28% of the state's population.²

According to Baltimore Neighborhood Indicators Alliance's *Vital Signs 3*, married couple households are 26.7 % of the population; single person households, 34.9%; single female-headed households, 25%; and single male-headed households, 5.4%.³ Fewer single person households are now headed by someone 65 or older. Single female-headed households are more likely to have a related child living in the same housing unit than their male counterparts.⁴

The A.M.E. Zion Church

The African Methodist Episcopal Zion Church (A.M.E. Zion), also known as *The Freedom Church*, celebrated its bicentennial in 1996. Its principal founder was James Varick. During the period of enslavement of Africans living in America, the church provided a network of activists and places of safety for persons escaping to freedom. Many of the key activists of the Underground Railroad in the United States and Canada were affiliated with the A.M.E. Zion Church, including Sojourner Truth, Harriet Tubman, Frederick Douglass, and the Reverend Jermaine Wesley Loguen, who ultimately became a bishop in the A.M.E. Zion Church.⁵

²Baltimore Neighborhood Indicators Alliance, "Vital Signs 3 Community Statistical Area Profiles" (2000-2003), available <<http://www.bnai.org/indicators/reports.html>> (12 April 2005).

³Ibid.

⁴Ibid.

⁵*The Book of Discipline*, xii.

The A.M.E. Zion Church originally incorporated under the name, the African Methodist Episcopal Church in America. However, the denomination has never been affiliated with the denomination of the same name founded by Richard Allen in Philadelphia. The term, Zion, was the name given to the first chapel built in New York City in 1801, and was officially added to the denominational title in 1848 to distinguish it from Allen's movement. Also, the name was chosen because it is the name most frequently used in the bible to designate the Church of God.⁶

Today the A.M.E. Zion Church has over 1.5 million members on five continents.⁷ There are twelve Episcopal Districts each presided over by a bishop. The A.M.E. Zion Church supports six colleges in the United States and Africa. The Chief institutions of higher learning are Livingstone College and Hood Theological Seminary, both in Salisbury, North Carolina. The A.M.E. Zion Church Headquarters is located in Charlotte, North Carolina, which also houses the denomination's publishing house.⁸

The John Wesley A.M.E. Zion Church

In 1927, the late Rev. W. J. Robinson and seven others founded the John Wesley A.M.E. Zion Church in East Baltimore. This was the second A.M.E. Zion Church in Baltimore City—the Pennsylvania Avenue A.M.E. Zion Church was the first. The growth of the mission was slow, but steady. In 1951, the mission ended and John Wesley A.M.E. Zion Church moved into its present location—two and one half blocks from the

⁶Ibid., iii-v.

⁷"Meaning of A.M.E. Zion," available <http://www.arps.org/amhersthhistory/goodwin/Mother_zion/Meaning_of_AME.htm> (26 February 2006).

⁸*New Members' Packet*, John Wesley A.M.E. Zion Church (Baltimore, Maryland, 2005), 37.

world-famous Johns Hopkins Hospital. The church had twenty-one pastors between 1951 and July, 2002.⁹

While the membership of John Wesley is relatively small, the seventy-nine year old church has grown substantially from the eight members that were there in 2002, when the researcher first arrived. Presently the church has 133 members: eighty-one females and fifty-two males. Of the total membership twenty-five are children, ages 2-11; twelve are youth, ages 12-20; sixty are young adults, ages 22-40; thirty are adults, ages 41-65; and, six are seniors, 65 and older. All but one of the members is African American. The average Sunday attendance is comprised of sixty adults and thirty children and/or youth. Twenty-three of the adult members are married; three are divorced and four are widowed. The remaining members are single. Twenty members live within walking distance of the church; sixty-one live in the city, but outside of the neighborhood, forty-six live in one or more of the surrounding counties and six (all from the same family) live in Delaware—fifty-five miles away. The average age of the adult members is 38 years old.

John Wesley A.M.E. Zion is a friendly, family-oriented church where many members keep in contact with one another outside of Sunday morning worship. The worship services are spirited and free-flowing. Each person is encouraged to know and to exercise his/her spiritual gift(s). Consistent with the A.M.E. Zion *Book of Discipline*, the membership is divided into *Classes* (small groups). *Class Leaders* are appointed annually and are responsible for checking on a small group of members weekly.¹⁰ The John

⁹Ibid., 40.

¹⁰*The Book of Discipline*, 106.

Wesley Church has five classes, with two leaders (one lay and one clergy) assigned to each class.

God has blessed the John Wesley Church with seven associate ministers and several active ministries including: a weekly 6:00 a.m. prayer service, bi-monthly street witnessing, weekly bible studies, monthly healing and deliverance services, prison ministry, substance abuse ministry, a weekly radio broadcast, a W.O.W. (worship on Wednesday) service as well as many of the ministries outlined in the A.M.E. Zion *Discipline*. In October, 2005, the church received a \$20,000 grant to implement Y.E.S. (Youth Entertainment Studios), a ministry designed to teach teenagers the music video production industry and to reinforce character building skills.¹¹ In lieu of a traditional Sunday School, John Wesley A.M.E. Zion has New Members' Classes and Children's Church on Sunday mornings. There are also monthly ministry fellowships and/or bible studies for men, women and couples.

Synergy

In 2004, the Barna Research Group of Ventura, California released results of a poll about divorce in the United States, after interviewing 3,614 adults from the forty-eight contiguous states. Their survey showed that the "likelihood of married adults getting divorced is identical among born again Christians and those who are not born again."¹² For the purposes of the Barna study, "born again Christians were defined as

¹¹A two-year "Direct Services Grant" awarded by the Annie E. Casey Foundation, Baltimore, MD., September, 2005.

¹²Barna Research Group, "Born Again Christians Just as Likely to Divorce as are Non-Christians" (8 Sept. 2004), available <<http://www.barna.org/FlexPage.aspx?Page=BarnaUpdate&BarnaUpdateID=170>> (27 June 2005).

people who said they had made a personal commitment to Jesus Christ that is still important in their life today and who also indicated they believe that when they die they will go to Heaven because they had confessed their sins and had accepted Jesus Christ as their savior.”¹³ The research showed that 35% of married born again Christians have experienced a divorce—the same percentage as those who were not born again.¹⁴ George Barna, president and founder of the Barna Research Group, commented:

One reason why the divorce statistic among non-Born again adults is not higher is that a larger proportion of that group cohabits, effectively side-stepping marriage – and divorce – altogether. Among born again adults, 80% have been married, compared to just 69% among the non-born again segment. If the non-born again population were to marry at the same rate as the born again group, it is likely that their divorce statistic would be roughly 38%—marginally higher than that among the born again group, but still surprisingly similar in magnitude.¹⁵

According to a 2001 report prepared for the Joint Center for Political and Economic Studies:

- In 2000, of all Americans age 15 and older 113 million (52.8%) were married and living with their spouses, while 19.8 million (or 9.3%) were divorced;
- Since 1950, there has been a substantial decrease in the marriage rates and an increase in the divorce rates of both African American and white women. The trends have been most pronounced among African Americans;
- The percentage of African American women who are married declined from 62% to 36.1% between 1950 and 2000;
- Among white women, the corresponding decline was from 66% to 57.4%. Trends in divorce have shown less difference between races, rising from 3% to 11.7% among blacks and from 2% to 10.2% among whites;
- The percentage of black men age 15 and older who are married dropped from 64% in 1950 to 42.8% in 2000;

¹³Ibid.

¹⁴Ibid.

¹⁵Ibid.

- The decline for white men was much smaller, dropping from 70.2% to 60%. However, divorce rates during this long period were similar for both races; they rose from 2% to 9.5% for black men and from 2.1% to 8.3% for white men.¹⁶

Given these startling statistics, especially the divorce rates for Christians in general and African Americans in particular, it is imperative that engaged couples receive biblically-based, solid premarital counseling focusing on building healthy, sustainable relationships. Many couples spend more time on wedding preparations than they do on preparing for one of the most significant and sacred experiences that they will ever have. In the researcher's opinion, for too long, the church has served as a place for wedding ceremonies based solely on a couple's desire to have a "church wedding." Christian marriage is more than a ceremony. It is a commitment between two people to Jesus Christ and to each other, as they understand what it takes to strengthen their relationships before they say the words, "I do" and "till death do us part."

Every couple hopes that they will live happily ever after. However, according to New York-based Marriage Success Training—an organization that offers seminars for engaged couples—only one in four actually will.¹⁷ Most divorces occur during the years immediately after the wedding. And, contrary to what some may believe, neither living together before the wedding nor having children increases the chance of marriage success. In fact, "when children are born marriage satisfaction can plummet."¹⁸

¹⁶Cassandra Cantave and Roderick Harrison, "Marriage and African Americans" (Washington, D.C.: Joint Center for Political and Economic Studies, 2001), available <<http://www.jointcenter.org/DB/printer/marital.htm>> (accessed 2 February 2005).

¹⁷Marriage Success Training, "Build the Foundation for Your Lifetime Together," available <<http://www.stayhitched.com>> (2 February 2005).

¹⁸Ibid.

It is important, therefore, that clergy and counselors responsible for providing guidance to engaged couples, are prepared to work with these couples. According to the Baltimore-based Center for Fathers, Families and Workforce Development (CFWD), children have the best outcomes when they are raised in families headed by two biological, married parents who have a healthy, stable relationship.¹⁹

As the product of divorced parents, as well as a former divorcée, the researcher is convinced that clergy persons must take a more active role in promoting the health and welfare of married couples. Although solid, biblically-based counseling does not guarantee the success of a marriage; such counseling helps to prepare couples for future challenges. Often pastors and other ministers have so many other responsibilities vying for their attention that this aspect of ministry is minimized.

This project offers a model based on relationship theology that facilitates working with engaged couples. In early 2005, because so many young adults attend the John Wesley A.M.E. Zion Church, the researcher was not surprised to learn that many romantic relationships had developed, and that five couples were eager to enter into a marital relationship. In her preaching and teaching, the researcher emphasized “marriage as an honorable estate” that pleases God. Even though the researcher stressed to the couples that they should complete premarital counseling before settling on a definite wedding date, the majority of the couples hoped to have weddings between the Fall of 2005 and the Summer of 2006.

¹⁹Center for Fathers, Families and Workforce Development, *Exploring Relationships and Marriage with Fragile Families Program for Couple's Facilitator Guide* (Baltimore, MD: Self-Published, 2005), 1.

CHAPTER TWO

THE STATE OF THE ART IN THIS MINISTRY PROJECT

Much has been written about relationships, especially marital relationships. Publications on a variety of topics—from getting a date to sustaining a marriage— can be found on the shelves of most bookstores and libraries. The majority of these works reflect the lifestyles and habits of the dominant (white American) culture. Given the state of African American marriages, there is a need for additional research and scholarship on marriage preparation and marriage from an African American perspective. The books described below represent a sampling of the resources that the researcher consulted.

Historical and Biblical Resources

In the book, *Ar'nt I a Woman? Female Slaves in the Plantation South* by Deborah White Gray,¹ the author explores the thinking patterns and habits of black women in and out of slavery. She writes an intriguing account of how slave women fared in the plantation South. Relying heavily on slave narratives and eyewitness accounts, she covers many topics including those relating to family life. She also explores male-female relationships during and after slavery. “What made slave male-female relationships unusual,” Gray White writes, “was the influence and power of the slave owner.”² White

¹Deborah Gray White, *Ar'nt I a Woman? Female Slaves in the Plantation South* (New York: Norton, 1999).

²*Ibid.*, 141.

points out that “we now know enough about antebellum bondage to appreciate that most female slaves had to rely on themselves for protection against the sexual attacks of masters and overseers, that for them marriage did not translate into protection or security.”³ This book was extremely helpful, as the researcher developed the historical foundation section of this project.

In *The History of Human Marriage*, a three-volume work published during the 19th Century, by Edward Westermarck, the author traces the history of marriage across civilizations and cultures.⁴ He describes marriage between a man and a woman as something more than a regulated sexual relation. Written in the late 1800’s, the book emphasizes traditional roles of husbands and wives, but gives very little information relative to African American marriages and relationships. It was interesting to note the detail that the author gives, especially of the courting habits of both animals and humans.

In the book *Traditional Marriages—The African Style Asantes & Yorubas* by Eugene Baffoe-Bonnie, the author contends that African marriages are based on long-established traditions involving not only the parents of the engaged couple, but the entire community.⁵ This book compares the strong tradition of support for marriage among African people with today’s struggle of keeping marriages alive through communication, commitment and core belief systems. The author clearly describes the ceremonies, the preparations, the day-to-day relationships and the expectations of support for the couple.

³Ibid., 16.

⁴Edward Westermarck, *The History of Human Marriage*, 2nd ed. (London and New York: Macmillan and Co., 1894), 26.

⁵Eugene Baffoe-Bonnie, *Traditional Marriages—The African Style* (Philadelphia, PA: Sankofa Creations, Inc., 1993), 1.

This book provides couples with an historical overview of marriage, from an African perspective.

In the book, *Marriage Laws in the Bible and the Talmud* by Louis M. Epstein, the author presents a comprehensive survey of Jewish law relative to marriage, beginning with the pre-biblical period.⁶ Notably, the various types of marriages recorded in the Hebrew bible included “concubinage” and “levirate” marriages. Because many of the technical terms used in this work have no clear English equivalent, the author used the original terminology of the Talmud. According to Epstein, Jews are “holy seed, heathens belong to the uncleanness of the nation and intermarriage is defilement.”⁷ The author also devoted space to the topic of incest and other marriage prohibitions. This book helped in understanding the various types of marriages included in the Hebrew bible and the laws affecting such marriages.

In his work, *The Birth of the Messiah*, Catholic theologian Raymond E. Brown offers a thorough commentary on the infancy narratives found in the gospels of Matthew and Luke.⁸ Brown pays particular attention to the problems of “corroborating witnesses and conflicting details in the infancy narratives.”⁹ His line by line exegesis was extremely helpful as the researcher studied Matthew’s account of the “marriage” of Joseph and Mary.¹⁰

⁶Louis M. Epstein, *Marriage Laws in the Bible and the Talmud* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1942).

⁷*Ibid.*, 162.

⁸Raymond E. Brown, *The Birth of the Messiah* (New York: Doubleday, 1979), introduction.

⁹*Ibid.*, 32-33.

¹⁰Matt. 1:18-25, Unless otherwise noted, all Scripture references are taken from the King James Version (KJV).

Theological Resources

In his recent book, *Martin Buber's I and Thou: Practicing Living Dialogue*, the author Kenneth Paul Kramer offers an in-depth study of Martin Buber's classic, *I and Thou*.¹¹ In doing so, Kramer carefully examines two translations: one by R.G. Smith who translates the German, "Ich and Du" as "I and Thou"; and the other by Walter Kaufman who translates the basic word pairs as "I and It" or "I and You." Believing that Smith's translation is closer to Buber's intent, Kramer relies on it more heavily. However, he includes both translations side-by-side with intervening commentary. The author depends primarily on the writings of Maurice Friedman who studied Buber for over fifty years. Kramer reiterates Friedman's position that to fully understand Buber, "One must understand that *Thou* is not an object, but a *relationship*."¹² This book was valuable as the researcher completed the theological foundation of this dissertation, and reflected on the true meaning of relationships.

In his book, *Encounter on a Narrow Ridge: A Life of Martin Buber*, author Maurice Friedman points out that "Buber's 'narrow ridge' is no 'happy middle' which ignores the reality of paradox and contradiction in order to escape from the suffering they produce. It is rather a paradoxical unity of what one usually understands only as alternatives — I and Thou, love and justice, dependence and freedom, the love of God and the fear of God, passion and direction, good and evil, unity and duality."¹³ Friedman,

¹¹Kenneth Paul Kramer, with Mechthild Gawlick, *Martin Buber's I and Thou Practicing Living Dialogue* (Mahwah, NJ: Paulist Press, 2003).

¹²*Ibid.*, 10.

¹³Maurice Friedman, *Encounter on a Narrow Ridge: A Life of Martin Buber* (New York: Paragon Press, 1991), xi.

a professor emeritus of Religious Studies, Philosophy and Comparative Literature at San Diego State University, spent more than fifty years studying the life and writings of Martin Buber. In the first part of this book, Friedman unravels Buber's *I and Thou* philosophy/theology. The rest of the book portrays Buber's application of his life of dialogue and his ever present "encounters on a narrow ridge," in the face of his many challenges—including his marriage to a non-Jew. This work and his other works were helpful, in understanding Buber's philosophy relative to paradoxes and contradictions in relationships.

In his more recently published book, Maurice Friedman's *Martin Buber: The Life of Dialogue*, Buber refers to this work as "The classic study of my thought." In addition, the book summarizes Buber's early intellectual development and attitudes – "his mysticism, his youthful existentialism, his philosophical Judaism and religious socialism."¹⁴ In this work, Friedman focuses on two crucial issues: Buber's *I-Thou* philosophy (versus *I-It*), and his probing of the nature and redemption of evil. Buber contends that man "can live securely and continuously and securely in the world of *It*, if he only lives in this world."¹⁵ However, according to Buber, "All real living is meeting."¹⁶ This book also helped the researcher's understanding of Buber's *I-Thou* versus his *I-It* philosophy/theology.

¹⁴Maurice Friedman, *Martin Buber: The Life of Dialogue* (London: Routledge, 2002), i.

¹⁵*Ibid.*, 66.

¹⁶*Ibid.*

Marriage/Premarital Resources

In the book, *Gender Talk: The Struggle for Women's Equality in African American Communities*, authors Johnnetta Betsch Cole and Beverly Guy-Sheftall use their own stories and those of others to provide insight into the dynamics of "Black Womanhood."¹⁷ The authors point out that these stories serve as a source of strength in decoding the complexities of male-female relationships. The book reminds its readers that African American women process issues of gender equity quite differently than their white counterparts. The book also speaks to the different communication styles of African American women. It is an excellent resource in helping both genders to understand that "different is not deficient" and the book was very helpful as the researcher developed premarital counseling session on communication and conflict.

Anita and Vera Diggs' *Staying Married: A Guide for African American Couples* used research and case histories as a framework for advising African American couples seeking to strengthen their relationships.¹⁸ Diggs' book covers topics to be considered before and during marriage. Especially helpful were the authors' fifty ways to enhance a marriage using community activism and church involvement. Other topics included dealing with blended families, intimacy, and tips for honest communication. This book, written in a down-to-earth style, gave the researcher invaluable information as she led the group premarital counseling sessions.

¹⁷Johnnetta Betsch Cole and Beverly Guy-Sheftall, *Gender Talk: The Struggle for Women's Equality in African-American Communities* (New York: Ballantine Publishing Group, 2003).

¹⁸Anita Doreen Diggs and Vera S.Paster Diggs, *Staying Married: A Guide for African American Couples* (New York: Kensington Publishing Corporation, 2000).

The Case for Marriage: Why Married People Are Happier, Healthier and Better Off Financially by Linda J. Waite and Maggie Gallagher presented original research that investigated the effects of marriage on various demographic groups. Waite and Gallagher contend that “there is a war on marriage between competing values: between rights and needs; between individualism and community; between fear and hope; and, between freedom and love.”¹⁹ The authors note that while “Americans are still the marrying kind; ideas about marriage have changed in subtle ways our ability to achieve the goals of wedlock.”²⁰ This book was helpful as the researcher conducted premarital counseling sessions on the different roles of men and women in marriage.

In the book, *Covenant Marriage* by Gary D. Chapman, the author contends that marriage is “designed by God to be the most intimate of human relationships,” but such intimacy cannot be obtained without what Chapman calls “wholesome responsible communication.”²¹ Chapman explores the difference between a contract marriage and a covenant marriage. He also notes that premarital counseling used to be a “sideline activity” of the church, but the increased number of divorces among Christians has troubled pastors and other clergy.²² According to the author, “Marriage is the second most important relationship a person can have.”²³ The most important relationship is a person’s relationship with God. Contract marriage, therefore, is simply one that follows

¹⁹Linda J. Waite and Maggie Gallagher, *The Case for Marriage: Why Married People Are Happier, Healthier, and Better Off Financially* (New York: Doubleday, 2000), 2.

²⁰ Ibid., 3.

²¹Gary Chapman, *Covenant Marriage: Building Communication and Intimacy* (Nashville, TN: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 2003), 37.

²²Ibid., introduction.

²³Ibid.

legal precepts; a covenant marriage is one that ascribes to biblical principles. This reference helped in the premarital session on the biblical definition of love and marriage.

Making Love Last Forever by Gary Smalley is a practical marriage manual that offers advice to couples on how to stay in love throughout their relationship.²⁴ According to Smalley, “The first step toward achieving a lifelong love with your spouse is learning to love life itself—every part of it, good and bad, harsh and rewarding.”²⁵ The author describes five “icebergs” that are certain to “sink” a marriage, as well as seven ways to release anger.²⁶ Using personal anecdotes, Smalley also offers signs of a happy marriage. From this book, the researcher gleaned useful ways to share effective conflict resolution skills and tools with the couples included in this project.

In their premarital manual *Let's Talk About Your Wedding & Marriage*, Bruce A. Rowlinson and George Hinn use creative ways, (i.e., games) to engage couples who are planning to be married.²⁷ This manual is especially helpful for the person who is reluctant to share his outer feelings. The exercises are designed to “break the ice” around communication issues. This researcher used some of the techniques in the premarital group session on effective communication.

Do It Yourself Conflict Resolution for Couples: Dynamic New Ways for Couples to Heal Their Own Relationships by Florence Bienenfeld contains useful exercises and activities for couples to explore their conflict resolution strengths and

²⁴Gary Smalley, *Making Love Last Forever* (Nashville, TN: W Publishing Group, 1996).

²⁵*Ibid.*, 1.

²⁶*Ibid.*, 35-36.

²⁷Bruce A. Rowlinson and George Hinn, *Let's Talk About Your Wedding & Marriage* (Alhambra, CA: Green Leaf Press, 1985).

needs.²⁸ Operating from the premise that conflict resolution takes time and energy, Bienenfeld details specific strategies for settling disagreements amicably. Many of the suggested activities reinforced effective ways of communicating. Topics discussed included: “expressing anger maturely,” “reducing tension and anxiety,” “power struggles,” and “healing troubled relationships.” The book was especially helpful in the group session dealing with communication and conflict.

²⁸Florence Bienenfeld, *Do It Yourself Conflict Resolution for Couples: Dynamic New Ways for Couples to Heal Their Own Relationships* (Franklin Lakes, NJ: Career Press, 1999).

CHAPTER THREE

THEORETICAL FOUNDATION

There are different types of relationships: familial relationships, love relationships, employer-employee relationships, student-teacher relationships, and friendships just to name a few. There are symbiotic relationships, competitive relationships and mutually beneficial relationships. “Of all human relationships, paradoxically enough, the marriage relationship is at once the most private and the most public.”¹ These words, written more than sixty years ago, are as true now as they were then—especially as the debate over what and who constitutes marriage in the United States ranges from political discussions in the White House to topical debates in almost every state and local forum.

In this theoretical foundation paper, the writer traces the history of relationships and marriage in the United States—with particular emphasis on the history of courtship and marriage in the African American tradition. Second, this researcher looks at Relational Theology as posited by Martin Buber, in his classic work *I and Thou*. Third, the researcher juxtaposes two biblical texts as examples of different types of marital relationships.

¹Louis M. Epstein, *Marriage Laws in the Bible and the Talmud* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1942), preface.

Historical Foundation

In his 1894 work, *The History of Human Marriage*, Henry Westermarck defines marriage as “a more or less durable connection between male and female, lasting beyond the mere act of propagation till after the birth of the offspring.”² *The Merriam Webster Dictionary* defines marriage as “the state of being united to a person of the opposite sex as husband or wife in a consensual and contractual relationship recognized by law.”³ In the English common law tradition, from which the United States developed its legal doctrines and concepts, a marriage is “based upon a voluntary private agreement by a man and a woman to become husband and wife.”⁴ Historically, however, marriage often has been defined by the culture. While most modern civilizations only recognize monogamous relationships, other cultures have practiced polyandry (the union of several husbands with one wife) and polygyny (the union of several wives with one husband) at one time or the other.⁵ And, today there is much debate in theological and secular circles over the legality and morality of same sex marriages.

Many would agree that Adam and Eve represented the first married couple. However, much has changed since the days of Adam and Eve. In fact, the Hebrew Bible records many examples of polygamous unions.⁶ Ancient Egyptians, in deference and

²Edward Westermarck, *The History of Human Marriage*, 2nd ed. (London and New York: MacMillan and Co., 1894), 19-20.

³*The Merriam-Webster Dictionary*, 11th ed., s.v., “Marriage.”

⁴Alexander Lak, “Marriage,” available <<http://www.law.cornel.edu/wex/index.php/Marriage>> (23 July 2005).

⁵*Merriam-Webster*, s.v. “polyandry,” “polygyny.”

⁶Theodore Gerald Soares, *The Social Institutions and Ideals of the Bible* (New York: Abingdon Press, 1915), 42.

homage to Egyptian gods, practiced brother-sister marriage. And, women born as biological males—sometimes called *berdache*—were considered the most desirable wives in some Native American cultures.⁷

Early American settlers practiced a variety of marriage traditions, as marriage was often seen as a way for the elite to consolidate power, wealth, and property. Common-law and other informal arrangements were more customary among the lower classes that had little property to protect. In addition, there were not enough clergy or judges available to officiate nuptials or organize records to keep track of marriages.⁸ This fact notwithstanding, nothing compared to the indignities suffered by African Americans during slavery, and the devastating impact that slavery had on African American families and marriages. Slaves married, but their unions were not considered to be legal. It was not until 1865 that African Americans were allowed to register existing marriages, and many of these were probably not reported due to the fee that was required to register them.⁹

In her book, *Ar'nt I a Woman?*, Deborah Gray White gives some insight into the courtship and marital traditions of slaves. According to White, whenever they had the opportunity (which was not often), slave women took great pleasure in making sure that they looked their best.

Only on Sundays, religious holidays, and other festive occasions could they [the women] dress in their finest. Their finest usually consisted of just one dress that had been laid aside and worn sparingly. They used sweet-smelling flowers and herbs as perfume

⁷Cindy Kuzma, "A Brief History of Marriage" (October, 2004), available <<http://www.plannedparenthood.org/pp2/portal/files/portal/webzine/newspoliticisactivism/>> (5 September 2005).

⁸Ibid.

⁹Cindy Kuzma, "African American Research, Part 2," available <<http://www.ancestry.com/learn/library/article.aspx?article=2170>> (23 July 2005).

and often kept the good dress packed in the flowers and herbs so that the clothing would absorb the pleasant fragrance. Hoops were made out of grape vines and were worn to make the dress fall neatly away from the body. A bright colored hat or head wrap made for the finishing touch. On the average, house servants dressed better than field hands since they had access to cast-offs from the master's family, but all slaves tried to dress up for religious services and parties.¹⁰

A slave from Union, South Carolina had this to say about the art of courting:

De gals come out in the starch dresses... They took their hair down outen the strings, and pulled off the head rags. De gals charmed us wid honeysuckle and rose petals hid in dere bosoms... Dey dried chennyberries and painted dem wo' em on a string around dere necks...courting gals...tried to do just like the young white missus would do.¹¹

There were many situations where men outnumbered women, which led to very competitive courtship rituals. In *Ar'nt I a Woman?*, the author relates the story of Sam, an antebellum Louisiana slave, who went to great lengths to garner the attention of a woman named "Miss Lively." During a Christmas party, she granted him the privilege of the first dance and they out lasted everyone on the dance floor, much to the chagrin of other young men who stood on the sidelines waiting to dance with "Miss Lively." "His legs flew like drumsticks down the outside and up the middle, by the side of his bewitching partner."¹²

However, before a marriage could take place, slaves had to get permission from their white owners. Some allowed slaves to marry; other slaveholders forbade slave marriages, while still others arranged marriages between slaves. During a 1937 interview,

¹⁰Deborah Gray White, *Ar'nt I a Woman? Female Slaves in the Plantation South* (New York: Norton, 1999), 143.

¹¹A.B. Botkin, ed. *Lay My Burden Down: A Folk History of Slavery* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1945), 145.

¹²White, *Ar'nt I a Woman?*, 144.

ex-slave Minnie Folkes, who was owned by the Belcher family of Chesterfield County, Virginia, recalled:

As to marriage, when a slave wanted to marry, why he would jes' ask his master to go over an' ask de other master could he take himself dis certain gal for a wife. Mind you now, dat master called all de slaves out o' quarters an' he'd make 'em line up see, stand in a row like soldiers. De slave man is wid his master when dis linin' up is gwine on, an' he pulls de gal to him he wants. De master make dem both jump over a broom stick an' dey is pronounced man an' wife.¹³

Annie L. Burton in *Memories of Childhood's Slavery Days* writes:

If a slave man and woman wished to marry, a party would be arranged some Saturday night among the slaves. The marriage ceremony consisted of the pair jumping over a stick. If no children were born within a year or so, the wife was sold. At New Year's, if there was any debt or mortgage on the plantation, the extra slaves were taken to Clayton and sold at the court house. In this way families were separated.¹⁴

Bethany Veney in *A Slave Woman* recalls her marriage:

Master Jonas Mannyfield lived seven miles from us, on the other side of the Blue Ridge; and he owned a likely young fellow called Jerry. We had always known each other, and now he wanted to marry me. Our masters were both willing; and there was nothing to hinder, except there was no minister about there to marry us. One day, there was a colored man—a peddler with his cart—on the road, and Jerry brought him in, and said he was ready to be minister for us. He asked us a few questions, which we answered in a satisfactory manner, and then he declared us husband and wife. I did not want him to make us promise that we would always be true to each other, forsaking all others, as the white people do in their marriage service, because I knew that at any time our masters could compel us to break such a promise... So Jerry and I were happy as, under all the circumstances, we could well be. When he asked his master's consent to our marriage, he told him he had thoughts of moving to Missouri, in which case he should take him with him, and we would have to be separated; but, if he chose to

¹³Charles L. Purdue, Jr., *Weevils in the Wheat* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1976), 94.

¹⁴Annie L. Burton, *Memories of Childhood's Slavery Days* (Boston: Ross Publishing, 1909), 6.

run the risk, he had nothing to say. Jerry did not think there was any danger, and we were not dissuaded; for hearts that love are much the same in bond or free, in white or black.¹⁵

Even though many slaveholders allowed and promoted slave marriages, one must not lose sight of the toll that slavery took on families. Slave owners were free to sell individual members of families separating husbands from wives and parents from children. It was estimated that 10% to 20% of slave marriages were destroyed by sale.¹⁶ This fact made many—especially the men—reluctant to marry. Henry Box Brown, who eventually escaped from slavery, in a three feet long by two feet wide wooden box, had this to say about his marriage:

I now began to think of entering the matrimonial state; and with that view I had formed an acquaintance with a young woman named Nancy, who was a slave belonging to a Mr. Leigh, a clerk in the bank, and, like many more slaveholders, professing to be a very pious man. We had made it up to get married, but it was necessary in the first place, to obtain our master's permission, as we could do nothing without their consent. I therefore went to Mr. Leigh, and made known to him my wishes, when he told me he never meant to sell Nancy, and if my master would agree never to sell me, I might marry her. He promised faithfully that he would not sell her, and pretended to entertain an extreme horror of separating families. He gave me a note to my master, and after they had discussed the matter over, I was allowed to marry the object of my choice. When Nancy became my wife she was living with a Mr. Reeves, a minister of the gospel, who had not long come from the north, where he had the character of being an anti-slavery man; but he had not been long in the south when all his anti-slavery notions vanished and he became a staunch advocate of slaveholding doctrines, and even wrote articles in favour of slavery which were published in the Richmond Republican. My wife was still the property of Mr. Leigh and, from the apparent sincerity of his promises to us, we felt confident that he would not separate us.

¹⁵Bethany Veney, with introduction by Rev. Bishop Mallalieu and commendatory notices from V.A., Cooper, *The Narrative of Bethany Veney, A Slave Woman*[Book on Line] (Worcester, Mass.: Press of Geo. H. Ellis), available <<http://docsouth.unc.edu/veney/veney.html>> (7 November 2005).

¹⁶University of Houston, "Slave Family Life," available <http://www.digital.history.uh.edu/black_voices/blackvoice_search.cfm?ID=22> (23 July 2005).

We had not, however, been married above twelve months, when scruples vanished, and he sold my wife to a Mr. Joseph H. Colquitt, a saddler, living in the city of Richmond, and a member of Dr. Plummer's church there. This Mr. Colquitt was an exceedingly cruel man, and he had a wife who was, if possible, still more cruel. She was very contrary and hard to be pleased she used to abuse my wife very much, not because she did not do her duty, but because, it was said, her manners were too refined for a slave.¹⁷

Louis Hughes could do nothing but watch as his master choked his wife for talking back to the mistress. And, he was just as powerless, when she was tied to a joist in the barn and beaten.¹⁸ Some men tried to protect their wives, but suffered dire consequences for doing so. Josiah Henson's father was badly beaten, after he tried to protect his wife. He then ran away so frequently that his master sold him.¹⁹

Even though enslaved men and women suffered greatly at the hands of their masters and mistresses, many married. According to *The Slave Narratives of Henry Bibb*, Bibb deferred his plans to escape for the love of Malinda. After marrying Malinda and fathering a daughter, Bibb was intent on having them escape with him. Eventually, however, he escaped and left them behind. Later he said, he had fond memories of them, but he regretted having permitted the "fascinating charms of a female to deter him from his goal of freedom." In fact, Bibb said he considered it a crime to become a husband and a father of slaves.²⁰

¹⁷William Box Brown, *Narrative of the Life of Henry Box Brown* (Manchester: Lee and Glynn, 1851), 32-34.

¹⁸Frederic Bancroft, *Slave Trading in the Old South* (New York: Frederick Unger, 1931), 21.

¹⁹Josiah Henson, *An Autobiography of the Reverend Josiah Henson in Four Fugitive Slave Narratives* (Reading, Mass.: Addison Wesley, 1969), 13-14.

²⁰Gilbert Osofsky ed., "Puttin' on Ole Massa": *The Slave Narratives of Henry Bibb, William Wells Brown, and Solomon Northup* (New York: Harper & Row, 1969), 74, 81.

On the other hand, some enslaved men refused to marry. AME Zion preacher, the Rev. Jermaine Wesley Loguen, once said, “I determined long ago never to marry until I was free. Slavery shall never own a wife or child of mine.”²¹ William Wells Brown felt the same way, “If I should have a wife, I should not be willing to leave her behind; and if I should attempt to bring her with me, the chances would be difficult for success.”²²

As slaves, Negro men needed permission from *massa* to marry. During Reconstruction, they were determined to live with whomever they pleased. In Georgia, for example, most plantation workers lived with the person of their choice, without the benefit of a marriage ceremony.²³ So, at first, *the freedman* simply devised his own marriage system—a system of cohabitation where men and women lived together without the benefit of a license or a ceremony.²⁴

This situation did not last very long. Four months after the Civil War, the Freedman’s Bureau issued regulations governing Negro marriages: (1) men had to be at least 21 years old and women, 18; (2) couples seeking marriage had to prove that they were not already married or that they had been separated at least three years; (3) churches and civil authorities were authorized to issue marriage permits for fifty cents each; (4) all ministers of the gospel and civil officials could solemnize marriage and issue a marriage license for one dollar—which then had to be sent to the Bureau; (5) religious organizations had the power to dissolve marriages: and, (6) detailed rules were drafted

²¹Rev. J.W. Loguen, *The Reverend J.W. Loguen as a Slave and as a Freeman* (Syracuse, NY: by the author, 1859), 223.

²²Osofsky, “*Puttin’ On Ole Massa*”, 213.

²³Henderson Hamilton Donald, *The Negro Freedman* (New York: Henry Schuman, 1952), 56.

²⁴*Ibid.*, 57.

prescribing the duties of husbands to “former wives” and the rights of wives and children.²⁵ In spite of these rules and regulations, desertion and divorce occurred frequently.

The most stabilizing force pre and post slavery was the Negro Church. The church was the center of community and political gatherings. Schools were located in the church. Lodges and other fraternal organizations met in the church. Meetings to discuss civic problems were held in the church.²⁶ Because a large proportion of the Negro population attended church, it was (and still is) a place where people met and socialized. Church socials, picnics and fellowships were common occurrences.

In 1863, emancipation gave the Negro man a new position of authority in the family along with new economic strength. He was able to sign for rental and work agreements and take an active part in caring for his family. He was responsible for either creating new communal life for his family or becoming a part of the community life that existed among those who were free before the Civil War. According to historian, E. Franklin Frazier, this “resulted in the complete transformation of these communities.”²⁷

These new leaders, who were often the preachers in the community, built homes as well as churches. Churches, therefore, became the centerpieces of community and family life. As an organization, churches censured and expelled sex offenders and those who failed to maintain monogamous relationships.²⁸

²⁵William W. Davis, *The Civil War and Reconstruction in Florida*, Columbia University Studies (New York: Columbia University, 1913), 383.

²⁶Arnold Rose, *The Negro in America* (Boston: The Beacon Press, 1944), 297-98.

²⁷E. Franklin Frazier, *The Negro Church in America* (New York: Schocken Books, 1969), 39.

²⁸*Ibid.*, 40.

The church was “the first social institution fully controlled by black men in America,” and its multiple functions testified to its centrality in the black community. Places of worship, churches also housed schools, social events, and political gatherings. In rural areas, church picnics, festivals, and excursions often provided the only opportunity for fellowship and recreation. The church served as an “Ecclesiastical Court House,” promoting moral values, adjudicating family disputes, and disciplining individuals for adultery and other illicit behavior. In every black community, ministers were among the most respected individuals, esteemed for their speaking ability, organizational talents, and good judgment on matters both public and private.²⁹

Today, the church is still an important participant in shaping values and mores around marriage and family life, but many problems persist. According to the United States Department of Health and Human Services’ Administration for Children and Families, “On the whole, African Americans have lower rates of marriage and marital stability than all other ethnic groups. They also have higher rates of single headed families than other groups.”³⁰ These statistics have prompted sweeping reforms to the federally-funded welfare system.

In 2002, in announcing these reforms, United States President George W. Bush declared, “My administration will give unprecedented support to strengthening marriage between one man and one woman. Many good programs help couples who want to get married and stay married. Premarital education programs can increase happiness in marriage and reduce divorce by teaching couples how to resolve conflict, how to improve

²⁹Eric Foner, *Reconstruction: America’s Unfinished Revolution, 1863-1877* (New York: Harper & Row Publishers, 1988), 102.

³⁰African American Healthy Marriage Initiative, “Marriage, Divorce, Childbirth, and Living Arrangements Among African American or Black Populations,” available <http://www.acf.hhs.gov/healthy-marriage/about/aami_marriage_statistics.htm> (25 October 2005).

communication and, most importantly, how to treat each other with respect.”³¹ In implementing what President Bush called a *Healthy Marriage Initiative*, the Bush administration is seeking faith-based partners.³² Some viewed these efforts as just a ploy to reduce the welfare rolls, while others viewed them as legitimate responses to a growing national crisis—a skyrocketing divorce rate that destroys the fabric of families, especially the development of children. In addition, some states and municipalities have introduced legislation in hopes of strengthening families by requiring premarital counseling before issuing marriage licenses.³³

Regardless of the Bush Administration’s motives, most African Americans who attend church on a regular basis, neither need President Bush nor a sophisticated research model to confirm what they see each Sunday: (1) there are more women in church than men; (2) there are more single women than married women in church ; (3) many children are brought to church by their grandparents, rather than their parents; (4) too many young people—even in the church—opt for cohabitation rather than marriage; and (5) there are more divorced or single persons in church, than those with long, stable marriages.

³¹George W. Bush, “Welfare Reform Agenda” (speech given at St. Luke’s Catholic Church in the District of Columbia, 26 February 2002).

³²Robert Franklin and Stephanie Boddie, *Healthy Marriages in Low-Income African American Communities: A Thematic Summary, Part I*, “Exploring Partnerships Between Faith Communities and the Marriage Movement” (Baltimore, MD: The Annie E. Casey Foundation, 2004), 4.

³³“Marriage Legislation,” available < <http://www.smartmarriages.com/legislation.html> > (10 November 2005).

Theological Foundation

Beginning with Genesis, the first book of the Bible, God's steps in creation are revealed. In less than seven days, God shapes and molds an entire universe from nothing, as the earth is transformed from a fiery ball of molten materials into a place capable of sustaining life. Life arises from lifelessness. Light illuminates the earth before plants take root. Plants appear before animals. Life in the sea flourishes long before there is life on the land. The higher mammals are among the last created, followed only by human beings, which are God's final creation.³⁴ There is increasing order and complexity with each passing day. Intelligence, design, and purpose are all evident and increasing with each verse. And, "God saw everything he had made, and behold, it was very good."³⁵ And, according to Gen. 2:2, "God ended his work which he had made, and he rested on the seventh day from all his work which he had made."³⁶

In Gen. 2:4, the Bible begins another story that appears to be a different account of creation. In this second story, God forms a man from the ground at a time that seems to precede the appearance of any plants or animals. God gives life to the man by breathing the "breath of life" into his nostrils. He then creates a garden, called Eden, where he places the man, with instructions to "dress it and to keep it."³⁷ God also encourages the man, Adam, to eat freely of every tree of the garden except the tree of the knowledge of

³⁴Gen. 1:2- 28, Unless otherwise noted, all Scripture references are taken from the King James Version (KJV).

³⁵Gen. 1:31.

³⁶Gen. 2:2.

³⁷Gen. 2:15.

good and evil.³⁸ God then notes that it is not good for Adam to be alone—“I will make him an help meet for him.”³⁹ Initially, animals are brought before Adam. Adam determines an appropriate name for each of them; but no suitable helper for him is found among the animals. God then places the man in a deep sleep and removes a rib from the man's side. “And the rib, which the Lord God had taken from man, made he a woman, and brought her unto the man to name. And Adam said, ‘This is now bone of my bones, and flesh of my flesh: she shall be called Woman because she was taken out of Man. Therefore shall a man leave his father and his mother, and shall cleave unto his wife: and they shall be one flesh’.”⁴⁰

Both creation stories depict an all-powerful God who conceives shapes, and forms everything in the Earth. The stories also depict a God who meticulously designed an order of relationships between himself and everything within his creation. God’s relationship with his human creation was a unique one. He cared so much for the first human beings that he put them in the midst of a lush, beautiful garden called Eden. This first couple, Adam and Eve, are told that they can stay in the wonderful garden forever as long as they refrain from eating of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. Yet, the Bible tells us, that neither Adam nor Eve heeded the Lord’s words, thus breaking the covenant—their relationship with God.⁴¹ But did they just sin against God or did their sin affect the rest of creation? Norman Pittenger, a relational process theologian, would describe their sin as “failure to participate in the purposes of love (which are God's

³⁸Gen. 2:17.

³⁹Gen. 2:18.

⁴⁰Gen. 2: 22-24.

⁴¹Ps. 51:4.

purposes in his world), rather than in terms of some 'state' into which man has 'fallen' or some radical evil in the world.”⁴² In her book, *The Fall to Violence: Original Sin in Relational Theology*, Marjorie Hewitt Suchocki defines Adam and Eve’s sin as “the violence of rebellion against creation and therefore a rebellion against creation’s well being.”⁴³ When one acts in isolation—caring only for his or her own wants and desires—he or she has engaged in what philosopher/theologian Martin Buber would call an *I-It* relationship, rather than an *I-Thou* relationship. The scope of this project does not afford the researcher the time to explore in depth either Pittenger’s or Suchocki’s theologies. Therefore, the remainder of this theological context section is devoted to the relational philosophy/theology of Martin Buber.

The concept of man’s relationship to God and to the universe is the foundation of Buber’s relational theology:

To man the world is two-fold, in accordance with his two-fold attitude; the attitude of man is two-fold, in accordance with the twofold nature of the primary words which he speaks; and, the primary words are not isolated words, but combined words. The one primary word is the combination *I-Thou*. The other primary word is the combination *I-It*; wherein, without a change in the primary word, one of the words *He* or *She* can replace *It*. Hence the *I* of man is also twofold. For the *I* of the primary word *I-Thou* is a different *I* from that of the primary word *I-It*. Primary words do not signify things, but they intimate relations. Primary words do not describe something that might exist independently of them, but being spoken they bring about existence. Primary words are spoken from the being. If *Thou* is said, the *I* of the combination *I-Thou* is said along with it. If *It* is said, the *I* of the combination *I-It* is said along with it. The primary word *I-Thou* can only be spoken

⁴²W. Norman Pittenger, “Process Theology,” *A Dictionary of Christian Theology* (1969), available <<http://www.philosophy-religion.org/handouts/process.htm>> (10 March 2006).

⁴³Marjorie Hewitt Suchocki, *The Fall to Violence: Original Sin in Relational Theology* (New York: Continuum International Publishing Group, 1995), 1.

with the whole being. The primary word *I-It* can never be spoken with the whole being.⁴⁴

Buber, a Jewish philosopher/theologian, captures the essence of the relational theological framework in his 1923 classic work, *Ich und Du (I and Thou)*. Here Buber describes how personal dialogue can define the nature of reality. His major theme is that human existence may be defined by the way in which we engage in dialogue with each other, with the world, and with God.

By his own definition, Buber was a *Schriftsteller*—both a writer and one who renders scriptures.⁴⁵ When asked whether he was a theologian or a philosopher, Buber quipped:

I must say it once again: I have no teaching. I only point to something...I point to something in reality that had not or had too little been seen. I take him who listens to me by the hand and lead him to the window. I open the window and point to what is outside. I have no teaching, but I carry on a conversation.⁴⁶

According to Buber, human beings may adopt two attitudes toward the world: *I-Thou* or *I-It*. *I-Thou* is a relation of subject-to-subject, while *I-It* is a relation of subject-to-object. By *Thou*, Buber is neither referring to God nor to a particular human entity. Rather with the word “du”, which one translator renders “thou” while another renders as “you,”⁴⁷ Buber is referring to “the presence of uniqueness and wholeness emerging from

⁴⁴Martin Buber, *The Writings of Martin Buber*, ed. Will Herberg (New York: Meridian Books, 1956), 43.

⁴⁵Martin Buber, *The Philosophy of Martin Buber* in *The Library of Living Philosophers*, eds. Paul Arthur Schilpp and Maurice Friedman (LaSalle, Ill., and London: Cambridge University Press, 1967), 693.

⁴⁶*Ibid.*

⁴⁷Kenneth Paul Kramer with Mechthild Gawlick, *Martin Buber's I and Thou Practicing Living Dialogue* (Mahwah, NJ: Paulist Press, 2003), 10.

genuine listening and responsible responding.”⁴⁸ In the *I-Thou* relationship, human beings are fully present with each other and respond to each other in unity. Buber perceived *Thou* as both “nothing” and “everything.” By *nothing*, he meant no particular object. By *everything*, he meant the unique presence of wholeness.⁴⁹ According to Buber, in a truly *I-Thou* relationship, human beings do not view each other as consisting of specific, isolated qualities, but engage in a dialogue involving each other's whole being. In the *I-It* relationship, on the other hand, human beings perceive each other as consisting of specific, isolated qualities, and view themselves as part of a world, which consists of things. *I-Thou* is a relationship of mutuality and reciprocity, while *I-It* is a relationship of separateness and detachment.⁵⁰

Buber explains that human beings may try to convert the subject-to-subject relation to a subject-to-object relation, or vice versa. However, the being of a subject is a unity which cannot be analyzed as an object. When a subject is analyzed as an object, the subject is no longer a subject, but becomes an object. When a subject is analyzed as an object, the subject is no longer a *Thou*, but becomes an *It*. The being which is analyzed as an object is the *It* in an *I-It* relation.⁵¹ The subject-to-subject relation affirms each subject as having a unity of being. When a subject chooses, or is chosen by, the *I-Thou* relation, this act involves the subject's whole being. Thus, the *I-Thou* relation is an act of choosing, or being chosen to become the subject of a subject-to-subject relation. The subject becomes a subject through the *I-Thou* relation, and the act of choosing this

⁴⁸Ibid., 19.

⁴⁹Ibid., 21.

⁵⁰Buber, *Writings of Martin Buber*, 14.

⁵¹Ibid.

relation affirms the subject's whole being.⁵² Buber says that the *I-Thou* relation is a subject-to-subject, direct interpersonal relation which is not mediated by any intervening system of ideas or any other relations. No objects of thought intervene between *I* and *Thou*.⁵³ Thus, *I-Thou* is not a means to some object or goal, but is an ultimate relation involving the whole being of each subject.

Participants in genuine dialogue, according to Buber, express three sets of characteristics: directness and wholeness; will and grace; and the presence of mutuality:

The *Thou* meets me through grace—it is not found by seeking. But my speaking of the primary word to it is an act of my being, is indeed *the* act of my being. The *Thou* meets me. But I step into direct relation with it. Hence the relation means being chosen and choosing, suffering and action in one; just as any action of the whole being, which means the suspension of all partial actions and consequently of all sensations of actions grounded only in their particular limitation is bound to resemble suffering. The primary word *I-Thou* can be spoken only with the whole being. Concentration and fusion into the whole being can never take place through my agency, nor can it ever take place without me. I become through my relation to the *Thou*; as I become *I*, I say *Thou*. All real living is meeting.⁵⁴

This genuine meeting intimates a living relationship of whole person to whole person. The “It,” when joined directly with an affirming “I” finds its reality. “Genuine meeting embodies directness and wholeness. By *directness*, Buber means immediacy and presence without agendas.”⁵⁵ This has huge implications for effective communication, especially for couples contemplating marriage. In explaining his philosophy of genuine

⁵²Ibid., 15.

⁵³Martin Buber, *I and Thou*, trans. Ronald Gregor Smith (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons 1958), 26.

⁵⁴Ibid., 11.

⁵⁵Kramer, *I and Thou*, 22.

meeting, Buber postulates that dialogical wholeness involves both surrender and action.⁵⁶ Wholeness includes both “choosing” to enter [a] relationship, and “being chosen” by one who also chooses to enter [into a] relationship. Given this distinction, it follows that both “choosing” and “being chosen” are prerequisites to wholeness and that the absence of either leads to a fragmented relationship.

Buber identifies the second characteristic that participants express in genuine dialogue as *will and grace*. “Grace” is not a theological term for Buber. The *Thou* meets the *I* through the “effective grace of reciprocal acts of compassion.”⁵⁷ This relational grace, for Buber, is not something that can be activated by will alone. Action and surrender “generate the interactive immediacy of meeting.”⁵⁸

Third, when the *I Thou* relationship is genuine, a mutual giving or reciprocity takes place. “You say *Thou* to *It* and give yourself to *It*. *It* says *Thou* to you and gives itself to you.”⁵⁹ Buber explains it this way:

Relation is mutual. My *Thou* affects me, as I affect it. We are molded by our pupils and built up by our works. The ‘bad’ man, lightly touched by the holy primary word, becomes one who reveals. How we are educated by children and by animals! We live our lives inscrutably included within the streaming mutual life of the universe.”⁶⁰

Genuine meeting involves mutual stand-taking and mutual self-giving. It also means being mutually present. This presence of mutuality pre-supposes what Buber calls

⁵⁶Ibid.

⁵⁷Ibid.

⁵⁸Ibid.

⁵⁹Kramer, *I and Thou*, 33.

⁶⁰Ibid., 15-16.

“the between.” The “between” describes the shared experience of the *I* and the *Thou*.

“The between” happens when a conscious self connects with a conscious other.

On the far side of the subjective, on this side of the objective, on the narrow ridge, where *I* and *Thou* meet, there is the realm of “between.” Here the genuine third alternative is indicated, the knowledge of which will help to bring about the genuine person again and to establish genuine community.⁶¹

When a genuine meeting fails to happen, Buber says that the result is a “mismatching.” A “mismatching” occurs “when seeming to be genuine or imposing one’s will on another takes precedence over being spontaneously none other than oneself.”⁶² Buber coined the phrase *Vergegnung*—“mismatching”—as he reflected on his relationship with his own mother.⁶³ Born in Vienna in 1878, Buber lived with his parents until his mother suddenly disappeared when he was three years old. Her disappearance was a mystery for years, until it was discovered that she had met and married an army officer, moved to Russia and started a brand new family there.⁶⁴ Young Buber was sent to live with his grandparents who tried to encourage him, but he reports that, at the tender age of four, his hopes of reuniting with his mother diminished rapidly after a conversation on the balcony between he and an older playmate:

We both leaned on the railing. I cannot remember that I spoke of my mother to my older comrade. But I hear still how the big girl said to me: “No, she will never come back.” I know that I remained silent, but also that I cherished no doubt of the truth of the spoken words. It remained fixed in me; from year to year it cleaved ever

⁶¹Martin Buber, *Between Man and Man*, Ronald Gregor Smith, trans. with an introduction by Maurice Friedman (New York: McMillan, 1965), 204.

⁶²Kramer, *I and Thou*, 45.

⁶³*Ibid.*, 46.

⁶⁴*Ibid.*

more to my heart, but after more than ten years I had begun to perceive it as something that concerned not only me, but all men.⁶⁵

Although he and his mother met again thirty years later, their reunion was strained. Buber contends that people live in a continuous exchange between meeting and “mismatching.” This happens when people are treated as objects among objects. Genuine meeting requires “unconditional trust and a willingness to be vulnerable to another.”⁶⁶

Buber claims that the most poignant dialogical moment occurs where *I and Thou* meet.

What is the eternal, primal phenomenon, present here and now, of that which we term revelation? It is the phenomenon that a man does not pass, from the moment of the supreme meeting, as the same being as he entered into it. The moment of meeting is not an “experience” that stirs in the receptive soul and grows to perfect blessedness; rather, in that moment something happens to the man. At times it is like a light breath, at times like a wrestling-bout, but always—it *happens*. The man who emerges from the act of pure relation that so involves his being has now in his being something more that has grown in him, of which he did not know before and whose origin he is not rightly able to indicate.⁶⁷

For Buber, a universal example of a genuine *I-Thou* relationship, a genuine meeting is the marriage relationship. Biographer Maurice Friedman explains that Buber’s relationship with his wife, Paula, was extremely important to his life’s work:

To grasp the full significance of Buber’s approach to love and marriage in *I and Thou*, we must first speak of his relationship to his wife Paula—an influence probably more decisive for his *I-Thou* philosophy than any of the events or meetings we have discussed. Buber’s dialogical thinking could have grown only out of his marriage to this strong and really “other” woman, this modern Ruth who left her family, home and religion, and finally even her country and people, for him. The fundamental reality of the life of dialogue—that is a confirmation and inclusion of

⁶⁵Martin Buber, *Meetings*, ed. and trans. with an introduction and bibliography by Maurice Friedman (La Salle, IL: Open Court Publishing, 1967), 18.

⁶⁶Kramer, *I and Thou*, 46.

⁶⁷Buber, *I and Thou*, 109.

otherness—was understood and authenticated in the love and the marriage, the tension and the companionship of his relationship to Paula.⁶⁸

Buber met Paula in the summer of 1899, while attending the University of Zurich.⁶⁹ Raised as a Munich Catholic, Paula converted to Judaism after her marriage to Buber. According to Friedman, Buber understood that Paula was emotionally stronger and more mature than Buber. She was well known for her keen intellect and penned poetry under the pseudonym George Munk. “In Paula” Friedman writes, “Martin found true equality of relationship. And with Paula, Buber came to recognize that a marriage is built upon the saying of *Thou*.”⁷⁰

While the failure of Buber's mother to return when he was three years old was the crucial "mismatching" of his life, his marriage to Paula was the crucial “meeting.” This “meeting” restored Buber’s ability to trust another and to genuinely encounter another as *Thou*. Friedman has concluded that the existential trust that underlies *I and Thou* and all of Buber's mature works would have been unthinkable without his relationship to Paula.⁷¹

When one looks at some of the earlier letters between Martin and Paula, a deep, genuine, romantic love and respect for one another emerges. In the summer of 1899, Paula wrote:

Sweet, dear, You must not start worrying immediately when a letter does not reach you ... I do earnestly ask that of you. I have fond feelings for your great work—I would never want to spoil it

⁶⁸Maurice Friedman, *Martin Buber's Life and Work* (New York: E.P. Dutton, 1961, Detroit, Mich.: Wayne State University Press, 1988), 336.

⁶⁹Maurice Friedman, *Encounter on the Narrow Ridge: A Life of Martin Buber* (New York: Paragon Press, 1991), 26.

⁷⁰Kramer, *I and Thou*, 85.

⁷¹Friedman, *Encounter on the Narrow Ridge*, 133.

for you but I would like to slip myself between you and the little everyday bothers, like a sheltering cloud. That is why I wish I were with you.⁷²

And, in a letter dated November 17, 1901 she wrote:

Dearest Mowgli,
Mowgli dear, you were lovable in your last little note. It has filled me with courage and joy again, dearest. Yes, of course, dear heart, I love you beyond anything. And the good days when we'll feel that properly from heart to heart, they're just beginning, my only one.⁷³

Buber's sincere trust in Paula's judgment and advice is apparent in this October 25, 1901 letter to her:

Dear Heart,
Your letter may well be the right answer to mine. It certainly has pushed me hard. There is one thing you cannot understand, dearest: that every moment here I am struggling with every fiber of my being to bear up against all my restlessness, against all my cares, against all my knowledge, against all my deprivation, against everything that is trying to crush me. Every moment. And that your letters are the only source of strength for me.⁷⁴

The 1928 poem that Buber wrote to Paula on the occasion of her fiftieth birthday aptly captures the impact of her strength, her integrity, and her honesty on his life's work:

On the day of Looking Back

The roaming one spoke to me: I am the spirit. The iridescent one spoke to me: I am the world. He had hovered round me with wings. She had encompassed me with her play of flames. Already I wanted to pander to them, Already my heart was duped, When there stepped before the demons A presence. To the roaming one it said: You are madness. To the iridescent one it said: You are deception. Then both spirit and world became open to me, The lies burst, and what was, was enough. You brought it about that I

⁷²Buber, *The Letters of Martin Buber*, ed. Nahum N. Galatzer (New York: Schocken Books, 1991), 66.

⁷³*Ibid.*, 79-80.

⁷⁴*Ibid.*, 79.

behold—Brought about? You only lived. You element and woman,
Soul and nature!⁷⁵

A year later, Buber again recognized the primacy of Paula in his life, as he dedicated his book *Dialogue to P*:

The abyss and the light of the worlds,
Time's need and eternity's desire,
Vision, event and poem:
They were and are dialogue with you.⁷⁶

Buber believed that love is not a relation of subject-to-object, but rather a subject-to-subject relation, a relation between *I and Thou*. In the *I-Thou* relation, subjects do not perceive each other as objects, but perceive each other's unity of being. Love is an *I-Thou* relation in which subjects share this unity of being. Love is also a relation in which *I and Thou* share a sense of caring, respect, commitment, and responsibility. In other words, according to Buber, feelings may accompany love, but feelings do not constitute love.⁷⁷ When the *I and Thou* experience a deep bonding, the result is real love. From this bonding, a loving relationship emerges because of the voluntarily assumed "responsibility of an *I* for a *Thou*."⁷⁸

One of the hallmarks of Buber's philosophy/theology is his understanding of the eternal *Thou*. He makes a distinction, however, between the "inborn *Thou*" and the eternal "*Thou*."

Every particular *Thou* is a glimpse through to the eternal *Thou*; by means of every particular *Thou* the primary word addresses the eternal *Thou*. Through this mediation of the *Thou* of all beings

⁷⁵Friedman, *Encounter on the Narrow Ridge*, 133.

⁷⁶*Ibid.*

⁷⁷Kramer, *I and Thou*, 23.

⁷⁸Buber, *I and Thou*, 14.

fulfillment, and non-fulfillment, of relations comes to them: the inborn *Thou* is realized in each relation and consummated in none. It is consummated only in the direct relation with the *Thou* that by its nature cannot become *It*.⁷⁹

In an attempt to simplify the above statement, Kramer offers the following explanation:⁸⁰

- The extended directions of genuine relationships meet in God;
- Every particular genuine relationship is a window to the “eternal *Thou*”;
- The “inborn *Thou*” is realized in each genuine relationship without being consummated; and
- The “inborn *Thou*” is only consummated in relationship with the “eternal *Thou*.”

According to Buber, God is the eternal *Thou*. God is the *Thou* who sustains the *I-Thou* relation eternally. “Our relationships with each other,” Buber concluded, “are never complete in and of themselves.”⁸¹ In the *I-Thou* relation between the individual and God, there is a unity of being in which the individual can always find God. In the *I-Thou* relation, there is no barrier of other relations which separate the individual from God, and thus the individual can speak directly to God.

The eternal *Thou* is not an object of experience, and is not an object of thought. The eternal *Thou* is not something which can be investigated or examined. The eternal *Thou* is not a knowable object. However, the eternal *Thou* can be known as the Absolute Person who gives unity to all being.⁸² Friedman writes, “God is the Absolute Person who is not a person but *becomes one*, so to speak, to love and be loved, to know and be known

⁷⁹*Ibid.*, 15.

⁸⁰Kramer, *I and Thou*, 133.

⁸¹*Ibid.*

⁸²Maurice Friedman, *Martin Buber and the Eternal* (New York: Human Sciences Press, 1986), 44.

by us.”⁸³ In response to critics, who questioned Buber’s description of God as a person, Buber wrote that in order to enter into relationships with humans, “God has put on himself ‘the servant’s garments of the person’.”⁸⁴ In other words, our interaction with and service to mankind is through God as “Absolute Person”:

The description of God as Person is indispensable for everyone one like myself means by “God” not a principle...and like myself means by “God” not an idea...: but who rather means by “God,” as I do, him who—whatever else he may be—enters into a direct relation with us men in creative, revealing and redeeming acts, and thus makes it possible for us to enter into a direct relation with him. This ground and meaning of our existence constitutes a mutuality arising again and again, such as can subsist only between persons. The concept of personal being is indeed completely incapable of declaring what God’s essential being is, but is both permitted and necessary to say that God is *also* a Person.⁸⁵

Jesus, on the other hand, was viewed by Buber as his “great brother”—fully human and unconditionally God’s son. According to Buber, Jesus was foremost a teacher who always was available to enter into dialogue with others and with God. Buber did not see Jesus’ uniqueness as consisting of something in him—a power in itself—for this would mean to empty the real, the present relation, of reality. Rather, Jesus’ uniqueness lay in the strength, the immediacy, the unconditionality of the “between.”⁸⁶

According to Buber, the quintessential aspect of genuine relationships is the act of “turning”—of shifting focus from ourselves to others. In “turning,” dialogue shifts from a

⁸³Ibid.

⁸⁴Martin Buber, *Philosophical Interrogations*, ed. Sidney and Beatrice Rome (New York: Hope, Rinehart & Winston, 1964), 911.

⁸⁵Buber, *I and Thou*, 135.

⁸⁶Friedman, *Encounter on the Narrow Ridge*, 140.

“self-reflexive monologue consumed in self-enjoyment toward the wordless depths of genuine *I-Thou* dialogue.”⁸⁷

In genuine dialogue the turning to the partner takes place in all truth, that is, it is a turning of the being. But where the dialogue is fulfilled in its being, between partners who have turned to one another in truth, who express themselves without reserve and are free of the desire for semblance, there is brought into being a memorable common fruitfulness which is to be found nowhere else.⁸⁸

Buber refers to “turning” as a practice, rather than a philosophy. As such, there are several unified elements including: being fully present, making the other present, obedient listening, affirming and confirming, imagining the other’s side, withholding nothing, surrendering trustingly and being willing to change.⁸⁹

Turning is the recognition of the Centre and the act of turning again to it. In this act of the being the buried relational power of man rises again, the wave that carries all the spheres of relation swells in living streams to give new life to our world. Perhaps not to our world alone. For this double movement of estrangement from the primal Source, in virtue of which the universe is sustained in the process of becoming, and of turning towards the primal Source, in virtue of which the universe is released in being...⁹⁰

This concept of “turning” is consistent with Buber’s claim that genuine meeting through dialogue is the central relational event. Genuine dialogue, according to Buber, will not be achieved unless there is first a shifting from “willfulness and self-attention

⁸⁷Kramer, *I and Thou*, 159.

⁸⁸Martin Buber, *The Knowledge of Man: A Philosophy of the Interhuman*, ed. with an Introductory Essay by Maurice Friedman, trans. Maurice Friedman and Ronald Gregor Smith (New York: Harper & Row Publishers, 1965), 85-86.

⁸⁹Kramer, *I and Thou*, 161.

⁹⁰Buber, *I and Thou*, 100-101.

toward interhuman meeting, toward the ‘central *Thou*’ of common mutuality.”⁹¹ In other words, before a person can enter into genuine dialogue with another, there must be a conscious shifting toward the other and, in so doing, a shifting toward the “eternal *Thou*.”

Relational grace is the result of this shifting or “turning” from selfishness toward genuine dialogue. Rather than being external to the dialogue, Buber postulates that relational grace “refers to the spirit of the ‘between’ that arises from, generates, and supports genuine interhuman meetings.”⁹² “Turning” is not a single act, but rather a double movement—a “turning” from separation and a “turning” toward deep bonding with others. It requires practice and intentionality. “Turning” means giving up self-asserting attitudes and behaviors.

Buber asserts that the key hindrance to “turning” is the persistent human belief in fate—a strong belief in the survival of the fittest, the law of instincts, social processes, dialectical materialism and cultural cycles.⁹³ This belief in fate, according to Buber, blocks “turning”:

He who is dominated by the idol that he wishes to win, to hold, and to keep—possessed by a desire for possession—has no way to God but that of turning, which is a change not only of the goal but also of the nature of his movement.⁹⁴

“Turning,” on the other hand, leads to a deep bonding with others:

For the two primary metacosmical movements of the world—expansion into its own being and turning to connexion—find their supreme human form, the real spiritual form of their struggle and adjustment, their mingling and separation, in the history of the

⁹¹Kramer, *I and Thou*, 162.

⁹²*Ibid.*

⁹³*Ibid.*, 164.

⁹⁴*Ibid.*

human relation to God. In turning the Word is born on earth, in expansion the Word enters the chrysalis form of religion, in fresh turning it is born again with new wings.⁹⁵

While “turning” takes place at the beginning of a dialogue, it is only possible when there is unconditional trust. The activity of “turning” “involves risk, the risk of giving oneself, of inner transformation.”⁹⁶

For Buber, another key to genuine dialogue is the concept of unconditional trust which Friedman summarizes by making the following observations:

- Dialogue begins with trust in existence that enables us to live from moment to moment and to meet what each new moment brings;
- Trust accepts the fact that a genuine relationship is two-sided and therefore beyond the control of our will;
- A corollary of existential trust is existential grace that comes to us from the situation;
- Existential trust cannot be induced by auto-suggestion;
- Existential trust involves the courage to address and the courage to respond;
- The courage to address and the courage to respond include the recognition that there are no formulae as to when and how to address and when and how to respond;
- The courage to respond begins with openness and a willingness to listen to the other.⁹⁷

Trust is an important component of any viable relationship – especially in a marriage relationship. This trust, Buber believed, is practiced as one engages in what Friedman called “a bold imaginative swinging—seeing through the eyes of the other and experiencing the other’s side of the relationship without ceasing to experience the

⁹⁵Buber, *I and Thou*, 116.

⁹⁶Martin Buber, *Pointing the Way: Collected Essays*, ed. and trans. with an introduction by Maurice Friedman (New York: Schocken Books, 1974), 206.

⁹⁷Maurice Friedman, *Touchstones of Reality: Existential Trust and the Community of Peace* (New York: E.P. Dutton, 1972), 318-331.

relationship from one's own side."⁹⁸ In a marriage, for example, one of the most important skills a couple has to master is effective communication, where both parties are not only heard, but responded to in a way that lets the other party know that actual listening occurred. Buber calls this capacity "inclusion," the ability to "experience the other's side in relationship; live the other's part in a common situation; stand again and again at both poles of relationship; and, experience the effect of reciprocal interaction."⁹⁹

According to Buber, really seeing another person is only possible when there is some form of relational reciprocity and equality. It requires: "practicing inclusion while maintaining your stand; realizing the other person's actual uniqueness; realizing the other person's potential wholeness; and, viewing the other person as fully meaningful."¹⁰⁰ In other words, a person must be willing to accept, affirm and confirm another. Buber writes that "the basis of interpersonal life is the wish of each person to be confirmed as what that person actually is, even as what he or she can become."¹⁰¹ In this researcher's opinion, this is a major concept, as Christian couples (before and during marriage) struggle with issues of submission, individuality, conflict resolution and effective communication.

Genuine dialogue can be either spoken or silent. Its essence lies in the fact that "each of the participants really has in mind the other or others in their present and particular being and turns to them with the intention of establishing a living mutual

⁹⁸Maurice Friedman, *Religion and Psychology: A Dialogical Approach* (New York: Paragon House, 1992), 38.

⁹⁹Kramer, *I and Thou*, 188.

¹⁰⁰*Ibid.*, 194-195.

¹⁰¹*Ibid.*, 196.

relation between himself and them."¹⁰² Acceptance, affirmation and confirmation are easier said than done. When one accepts, affirms and confirms another, it suggests a willingness to fully engage, to be fully present in the present and a promise to be as fully engaged in future encounters. It suggests that one can be in relationship with another by fully accepting that person without trying to change them. It suggests, as Buber would say, receptivity to the *I and Thou* and to an authentic relationship—an authentic relationship with God and with one another.

Employing many of the principles of the *I-Thou* dyad are essential in a marital relationship, as prayerfully two whole people enter into covenant with God and with each other. Buber's relational theology is extremely useful in understanding the dynamics of couples' interactions, as well as in helping engaged couples to understand that marriage is a unique partnership.

Biblical Foundation

This researcher strongly believes that God intended for marriage to be between one man and one woman. Referring to Adam, in Gen. 2:18 "...the Lord God said, 'It is not good that the man should be alone; I will make him an help meet for him'." The words *help meet* also appear in the *Jerusalem Bible*. "It is translated as 'helper' in many other translations (e.g. *Amplified Bible*, *An American Translation*, *James Moffatt Translation*, *New American Standard Bible*, *New Century Version*, *New International Version*, *New Revised Standard Version*, and *Young's Literal Translation*). *The Living Bible*, *New Living Translation*, and

¹⁰²Paul Arthur Schilpp and Maurice Friedman, eds., *The Philosophy of Martin Buber* (La Salle, IL: Open Court Publishing, 1967), 175.

Today's English Version use the phrase 'a suitable companion to help him'.¹⁰³ The words "help and meet" are the same Hebrew word. The word is *ezer* which comes from a primitive root word that means to surround, to protect or aid, help, helper succor. Therefore it means to help, assist or aid. Eve was created to be alongside of Adam as his "other half" to be his aid and his help.¹⁰⁴

Therefore, the original Hebrew word, when used to refer to humans, implies a partnership of two equals, rather than a relationship between persons of unequal status. "Co-worker" or "partner" might be a better translation. The *Contemporary English Version*, *New American Bible*, and *Revised English Bible* use the term "partner" indicating an equal status between Adam and Eve.¹⁰⁵ Martin Buber, whose theology this researcher discussed in the theological foundation section of this chapter, would call this a genuine *I and Thou* relationship.

In this researcher's opinion, Buber also would call the relationship between Joseph and Mary (as described in Matt. 1:18-25) a genuine *I-Thou* relationship. On the other hand, some aspects of the relationship between another biblical couple, Abram and Sarai, seem to fit Buber's *I-It* model—especially as it relates to Abram's treatment of Sarai in Gen. 12:10-20 and again in Genesis 20. In this biblical foundation section, the researcher explores the dyadic relationships between Joseph and Mary and Abram and Sarai, in an attempt to have a clearer understanding of how strong, stable, and satisfying marriages are developed.

¹⁰³"Family Types Mentioned in the Bible," available <http://www.religious tolerance.org/mar_bibl.htm> (5 December 2005).

¹⁰⁴"What Does the Bible Say About Marriage?" available <<http://www.got questions.org/marriage-Bible.html>> (5 December 2005).

¹⁰⁵*Ibid.*

Abram and Sarai (Gen. 12: 10-20 and Gen. 20:1-18)
An example of an *I-It* Relationship¹⁰⁶

Gen. 12:10-20

10 Now there was a famine in the land, and Abram went down to Egypt to dwell there, for the famine *was* severe in the land. 11 And it came to pass, when he was close to entering Egypt, that he said to Sarai his wife, "Indeed I know that you *are* a woman of beautiful countenance. 12 Therefore it will happen, when the Egyptians see you, that they will say, 'This *is* his wife'; and they will kill me, but they will let you live. 13 Please say you *are* my sister, that it may be well with me for your sake, and that I may live because of you." 14 So it was, when Abram came into Egypt, that the Egyptians saw the woman, that she *was* very beautiful. 15 The princes of Pharaoh also saw her and commended her to Pharaoh. And the woman was taken to Pharaoh's house. 16 He treated Abram well for her sake. He had sheep, oxen, male donkeys, male and female servants, female donkeys, and camels. 17 But the LORD plagued Pharaoh and his house with great plagues because of Sarai, Abram's wife. 18 And Pharaoh called Abram and said, "What *is* this you have done to me? Why did you not tell me that she *was* your wife? 19 Why did you say, 'She *is* my sister'? I might have taken her as my wife. Now therefore, here is your wife; take *her* and go your way." 20 So Pharaoh commanded *his* men concerning him; and they sent him away, with his wife and all that he had.

Gen. 20:1-18

1 And Abraham journeyed from there to the South, and dwelt between Kadesh and Shur, and stayed in Gerar. 2 Now Abraham said of Sarah his wife, "She *is* my sister." And Abimelech king of Gerar sent and took Sarah. 3 But God came to Abimelech in a dream by night, and said to him, "Indeed you *are* a dead man because of the woman whom you have taken, for she *is* a man's wife." 4 But Abimelech had not come near her; and he said, "Lord, will You slay a righteous nation also? 5 Did he not say to me, 'She *is* my sister'? And she, even she herself said, 'He *is* my brother.' In the integrity of my heart and innocence of my hands I have done this." 6 And God said to him in a dream, "Yes, I know that you did this in the integrity of your heart. For I also withheld you from sinning against Me; therefore I did not let you touch her. 7 Now therefore, restore the man's wife; for he *is* a prophet, and he will

¹⁰⁶NKJV.

pray for you and you shall live. But if you do not restore *her*, know that you shall surely die, you and all who *are* yours.” 8 So Abimelech rose early in the morning, called all his servants, and told all these things in their hearing; and the men were very much afraid. 9 And Abimelech called Abraham and said to him, “What have you done to us? How have I offended you, that you have brought on me and on my kingdom a great sin? You have done deeds to me that ought not to be done.” 10 Then Abimelech said to Abraham, “What did you have in view, that you have done this thing?” 11 And Abraham said, “Because I thought, surely the fear of God *is* not in this place; and they will kill me on account of my wife. 12 But indeed *she is* truly my sister. She *is* the daughter of my father, but not the daughter of my mother; and she became my wife. 13 And it came to pass, when God caused me to wander from my father’s house that I said to her: “This *is* your kindness that you should do for me: in every place, wherever we go, say of me, ‘He *is* my brother’.” 14 Then Abimelech took sheep, oxen, and male and female servants, and gave *them* to Abraham; and he restored Sarah his wife to him. 15 And Abimelech said, “See, my land *is* before you; dwell where it pleases you.” 16 Then to Sarah he said, “Behold, I have given your brother a thousand *pieces* of silver; indeed this vindicates you before all who *are* with you and before everybody.” Thus she was rebuked. 17 So Abraham prayed to God; and God healed Abimelech, his wife, and his female servants. Then they bore *children*; 18 for the LORD had closed up all the wombs of the house of Abimelech because of Sarah, Abraham’s wife.

Not once, not twice, but three times in the book of Genesis one finds a narrative account of a patriarch attempting to pass his wife off as his sister. In all three accounts (Gen. 12:10-20, Gen. 20:1- 18 and Gen. 26:1-11), the “husband” excuses his behavior as necessary because his spouse is very beautiful and/or because they are in unfamiliar, foreign territory. While the researcher is not able to explore all three accounts, at this time, attention will be given to the narratives found in Gen. 12:10-20 and Gen. 20:1-18.

In the book of Genesis, chapters 11, 12, and 13, the biblical account of the migration of Sarai and Abram from Ur in southern Mesopotamia to Canaan, and the Promised Land is set forth. Terah, Abram's father, has two other sons: Nahor and Haran.

Haran has died in Ur, leaving a son, Lot. Abram has a wife, Sarai. The people who migrate from Ur are Terah, his son Abram, his daughter-in-law Sarai, and his grandson Lot. No mention is made as to the whereabouts of Nahor at this time. A comment also is made about Sarai: she has no child. The family leaves Ur and travels up the Euphrates River to a northern town called Haran. They settle there for a while, and Terah dies. The story continues with Abram getting a message from a deity called El Shaddai, who tells him to leave his homeland and go to "a land that I will show you." Abram takes his wife and his nephew "and all the wealth they had amassed and all the persons they had acquired in Haran," and they go to Canaan.¹⁰⁷

On their way through Canaan, the group stops at local sanctuaries at Shechem and Bethel, where Abram builds altars. As they continue their journey they find that there is drought in the land of Canaan, so they go on south to Egypt. So far, the reader knows at least three things about Sarai: she is the wife of Abram, she is the daughter-in-law of Terah and she is childless. So far, so good—except to be childless was seen as a curse in the Old Testament because men passed on their inheritance through their children.¹⁰⁸

When Abram and his entourage arrive in Egypt, a very strange thing happens. Just as they are about to enter Egypt, Abram says to his wife, "Behold now, I know that thou art a fair woman to look upon: Therefore it shall come to pass, when the Egyptians shall see thee, that they shall say, This is his wife: but they will kill me, but they will save thee alive. Say, I pray thee, thou art my sister: that it may be well with me for thy sake; and

¹⁰⁷Gen.12:4-5, NKJV.

¹⁰⁸Num. 36: 6-9.

my soul shall live because of thee.”¹⁰⁹ And just as Abram had predicted, Pharaoh’s henchmen commend Sarai’s beauty to Pharaoh and she is taken into the palace.

Two things are obvious: (1) Sarai complies with Abram’s request and tells Pharaoh that she is Abram’s sister, rather than his *wife* and (2) she offers no protest when she is taken into Pharaoh’s harem. Subsequently, in exchange for Sarai, Abram receives sheep, oxen, he asses, she asses, men and women servants and camels. On the other hand, because of Abram’s actions, the Lord caused great plagues to come upon Pharaoh and his house. Interestingly, even though the narrative offers no explanation, Pharaoh knew that Abram was the source of his trouble so he confronted him and then sent him away with his wife/sister and all of his belongings.

As pointed out previously, this basic narrative, with only slight variations, is repeated three times in Genesis: the first, in the Genesis 12 account, involves Sarai, Abram and Pharaoh; the second, in the Genesis 20 account, involves Sarai, Abram and Abimelech (the ruler of Gerar) and the third, in Genesis 26, involves Rebekah, Isaac and Abimelech. In each case, the patriarch—the husband—begs his wife to say that she is his sister. The fact that this theme is repeated in the Genesis narratives three times poses many questions about the role and expectations of both the husband and the wife in a marital relationship.

The issue in Genesis 12, as well as in Genesis 20, is not so much that Abram lies (because Sarai technically is his half-sister), but that he asks his wife to conceal the nature of their relationship to protect himself. This is an interesting situation because it suggests that murder might be alright (Abram was afraid for his life), but not adultery.

¹⁰⁹Gen. 12:11-13.

One cannot help but wonder whether or not a wife was so indispensable, so devalued, and so insignificant that her husband was willing to offer her to another man to save his own life. Or, was a wife so submissive that she just went along with anything that her husband said? And even though incest was taboo, Abram (whose name was changed to Abraham in Genesis 17) tells King Abimelech that his wife Sarai (whose name was changed to Sarah) is really his sister. Most biblical scholarship, assuming that Abraham and Sarah were governed by the prevailing patriarchal system, focus on the brother-sister relationship more than the relationship between husband and wife.

Biblical scholar, E.A. Speiser notes that while the narratives in Genesis 12 and Genesis 20 have many similarities, they differ in characters and detail. Speiser suggests that each account must have originated from a different source with transcription by a different redactor.¹¹⁰ In the Genesis 12 account, Speiser contends that the unknown redactor was called J. for Jehovah; and in the Genesis 20 account, the name Elohim is used as the name of God, so the redactor is designated as E. Speiser suggests that there was an original story about a sister, a brother and a king and that redactor E. applied that basic story to Sarah, Abraham and Abimelech.¹¹¹ “Abram was influenced by the society in which he lived,”¹¹² Speiser points out “where the bonds of marriage were strongest and

¹¹⁰E.A. Speiser, “Genesis,” in *The Anchor Bible* (Garden City, New York: Doubleday & Co., 1964), xxxii.

¹¹¹Savina J. Teubal, *Sarah the Priestess: The First Matriarch of Genesis*. (Athens, OH: Ohio University Press, 1984), 12.

¹¹²E.A. Speiser, “The Wife-Sister Motif in the Patriarchal Narratives,” in *Biblical and Other Stories*, ed. A. Altman (Boston: Harvard University Press, 1963), 15-28.

most solemn when the wife had simultaneously the judicial status of a sister, regardless of actual blood ties.”¹¹³

According to Speiser’s research, a man had greater authority over his wife if she was also his sister. In fact, a woman enjoyed a higher status and a higher degree of protection if she was both his wife and his sister.¹¹⁴ This explanation, in the researcher’s opinion, reduces the wife to a convenient commodity to be used or abused at the pleasure of her husband. Speiser goes on to say that, “The purpose of marriage in the Near East was to provide an heir and the higher the status of the mother, the higher the status of the heir. The purity of the content was protected by the quality of the container.”¹¹⁵

Continuing this line of thinking, Speiser concludes “Abram was married to a woman who enjoyed privileged status. It was that kind of distinction that may well be worthy of emphasis in the presence of their royal hosts, since it enhanced the credentials of the visitors. Status has always played a role in international relations, as far back as available records can take us.”¹¹⁶ While this may be true in some cases, status did not seem to play a big part in the Genesis narratives under review. Pharaoh and Abimelech were quick to eject Sarah from their harems, once they found out that her true status was that of wife and not sister—and once they began experiencing hardships because Sarah was in their harems.

Sarah does not have a voice in either the Genesis 12 or the Genesis 20 narratives. While this could reflect the patriarchy of the time, Sarah’s voice is heard in

¹¹³Speiser, “Genesis,” 92.

¹¹⁴Ibid.

¹¹⁵Ibid., 94.

¹¹⁶Ibid., 93.

other instances. Most notably, in Genesis 21, Sarah boldly tells Abraham to “cast out this bondwoman [Hagar] and her son [Ishmael]: for the son of this bondwoman shall not be heir with my son, even with Isaac.”¹¹⁷ However, in the narratives under discussion (Genesis 12 and Genesis 20), perhaps—as some have speculated—Sarah simply chooses not to respond.¹¹⁸ Whether or not her silence is indicative of her relationship with Abram, or simply a conscious choice, is difficult to tell from the text. Abram’s inability or unwillingness to speak up when Sarai is “taken” is also puzzling. Even in her silence, Sarai has a position of power. The narrative in Genesis 12 refers to Sarai thirteen times, “moving from being Abram’s wife to his sister to ‘the woman’ to Pharaoh’s wife and back to Abram’s wife.”¹¹⁹

In Genesis 20, it is interesting to note that this is the first time Abraham and Sarah are on journey since the Genesis 12 narrative, where Abraham allowed Sarah to be put at risk some twenty-five years before. The journey takes them to Gerar in the southwestern corner of Canaan. Once again Abraham claimed that Sarah was his sister and not his wife. And once again Sarah is taken into the king’s harem. Although much has happened in the intervening chapters, including a name change for both Abram and Sarai, the result is the same. Abram, now Abraham, is willing to sacrifice his wife to protect himself. The commentary in the *New Interpreter’s Bible* reminds the reader that Abraham knowingly places Sarah’s life and well-being in jeopardy.¹²⁰ One also is reminded of the fact that God is omnipresent. Almost immediately after Abimelech

¹¹⁷Gen. 21:10.

¹¹⁸*The New Interpreter’s Bible*, vol.1 (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1994), 430.

¹¹⁹Ibid.

¹²⁰Ibid., 481.

takes Sarah, God steps in to protect her by speaking to Abimelech in a dream. Dreams were considered to be a medium of divine revelation; an encounter with God Himself.¹²¹ Through his actions, not once but twice, Abraham demonstrated that he did not have Sarah's best interest at heart; that he viewed his relationship with her as an *I-It* relationship. It is encouraging, however, to know that God is always there as a protector and a guide.

Literary Form

Generally, the biblical passages Gen. 12:10-20 and Gen. 20:1-18 are recognized as variants of a folktale, but there is no agreement about which one represents the oldest form of the story. Hermann Gunkel, believing that the account in Gen. 12:10-20 was the oldest, also believed that the function of the narrative was to "celebrate the cleverness of the patriarch, the beauty and submission of his wife, and the faithful help of Yahweh."¹²² These folktales, whose primary function was entertainment, had a simple structure that consisted of five elements:

- A situation of need, problem or crisis;
- A plan to deal with the problem (wise or foolish);
- The execution of the plan with some complication;
- An unexpected outside intervention; and,
- Fortunate or unfortunate consequences.¹²³

¹²¹Ibid.

¹²²John Van Seters, *Abraham in History and Tradition* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1975), 168.

¹²³Ibid.

The five-step structure outlined above is found in Gen. 12: 10-20:

- There is a crisis in that a famine in Canaan has forced Abram and Sarai to travel to a foreign and potentially hostile region—where in Abram’s opinion a beautiful woman like Sarai could endanger his life;
- There is a plan devised by Abram that they act like brother and sister, rather than like husband and wife;
- The plan is put in effect and is successful as far as sparing Abram’s life, but there is a complication—Sarai is taken into the royal harem;
- There is an unexpected outside intervention by God who plagues Pharaoh; and,
- Pharaoh simply sends Abram and Sarai away, but Abram leaves richer than he was when he came.¹²⁴

There is also a well-thought out balance in the structure of the story, which speaks to the art of storytelling. This is the first principle of A. Olrik’s epic laws of folk literature—the stability of the introduction and conclusion.¹²⁵ Olrik’s other laws apply as well to the Genesis 12 account: “repetition, the number three, scenic duality, law of the twin, singleness of direction, concrete details of the main scene, logic and consistency of treatment.”¹²⁶ There is a singleness of direction without the need to return to any previous point in the story. There is a clear situation as a point of departure and an appropriate conclusion. The principle of scenic duality, first with Abram and Sarai, and then with Abram and Pharaoh, is consistently maintained. The number three is prominent as the narrative has three main characters, although Sarai’s role is a passive one. The concentration of the narrative remains on Abram and his actions or inactivity. It also is interesting to note that the narrative is self-contained. It is complete in every way.¹²⁷

¹²⁴Ibid.

¹²⁵Ibid., 169.

¹²⁶Ibid., 160.

¹²⁷Klaus Koch, *The Growth of the Biblical Tradition: The Form-Critical Method* (New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1969), 115-17.

The narrative in Genesis 20 differs in form from the one, in Genesis 12 in terms of literary style. First, there is not a famine in the land which means that there is not an apparent problem situation. Second, the text itself does not give a reason why Abraham goes near Gerar, and there is no obvious threat to the patriarch. Third, the next two elements in Olrik's laws of folktales—the plan and its execution—which represented at least half of the Genesis 12 narrative are relegated to half a verse in Genesis 20. Fourth, Abraham's remark, "She is my sister," is not explained until later in the narrative. This type of resumptive style, according to Gunkel, is a feature of literary style but according to Olrik's laws, it is not a feature of oral storytelling.¹²⁸ It appears, however, as if the narrator of Genesis 20 had the earlier episode in mind. "And it came to pass," Abraham told Abimelech, "when God caused me to wander from my father's house that I said to her [Sarah] 'This is your kindness that you should do for me: in every place, wherever we go, say of me, He is my brother'."¹²⁹

In the Genesis 20 account, unlike the Genesis 12 account, Abraham is quick to justify his actions by saying that Sarah is his half-sister whom he happened to marry. While this custom is prohibited in a number of later Levitical laws, injunctions against marrying a half-sister were added to the codes after these two narratives were written.¹³⁰ Abraham also uses a religious motive as a defense in Genesis 20. When asked by Abimelech why he did what he did, Abraham said, "Because I thought surely the fear of

¹²⁸ Hermann Gunkel, ed. *Genesis*, trans. Mark E. Biddle (Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 1997), 221.

¹²⁹ *Gen. 20:13*, NKJV.

¹³⁰ David Daube, *Studies in Biblical Law* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1947), 78-82.

God is not in this place; and they will kill me on account of my wife.”¹³¹ His conduct differs little from that of Lot’s in Sodom and Gomorrah. Lot, by inviting the two strangers under his roof, assured them of protection. Rather than break this commitment, he was willing to sacrifice the purity of his two virgin daughters and give them over to the men outside his door.¹³² Abraham, fearing for his own safety, was willing to give over his wife to the king to protect himself from harm.

At no time did Abram/Abraham own his part in the abuse of Sarai/Sarah. He never acknowledged his sin. In both the Genesis 12 and the Genesis 20 accounts, he treats Sarah more like property, than one with whom he has a genuine relationship. He was willing to sacrifice Sarah to save his own life and seemed to have little regard either for her as a person or for their marriage bond. For her part, Sarah either was too afraid of Abraham, or felt that she had to do everything he said regardless of the consequences. The fact that she was a victim not once, but twice, suggests that she was not valued, cared for, or protected, as one would be in a genuine *I-Thou* relationship.

Joseph and Mary in Matt. 1:18-25: An example of a genuine *I-Thou* Relationship

While the Abram/Abraham, Sarai/Sarah texts discussed above are examples of an *I-It* relationship, the Joseph and Mary narrative recorded in Matthew 1 is an example of a genuine *I-Thou* relationship—one where the couple values one another as subject, rather than as object.

18 Now the birth of Jesus Christ was as follows: After His mother Mary was betrothed to Joseph, before they came together, she was

¹³¹Gen. 20:11, NKJV.

¹³²Gen. 19:8, NKJV.

found with child of the Holy Spirit. 19 Then Joseph her husband, being a just *man*, and not wanting to make her a public example, was minded to put her away secretly. 20 But while he thought about these things, behold, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream, saying, “Joseph, son of David, do not be afraid to take to you Mary your wife, for that which is conceived in her is of the Holy Spirit. 21 And she will bring forth a Son, and you shall call His name JESUS, for He will save His people from their sins.” 22 So all this was done that it might be fulfilled which was spoken by the Lord through the prophet, saying: 23 “Behold, the virgin shall be with child, and bear a Son, and they shall call His name Immanuel,” which is translated, “God with us.” 24 Then Joseph, being aroused from sleep, did as the angel of the Lord commanded him and took to him his wife, 25 and did not know her till she had brought forth her firstborn Son. And he called His name JESUS.¹³³

The Gospel according to Matthew encompasses the fullness of Jesus’ incarnation, life, teaching, death and resurrection. The Gospel starts with a long list of names—the genealogy of Jesus—drawing attention to Jesus’ connection with David and with Abraham. “Jesus is the fulfillment of all history, and in particular of God’s promise to Abraham that in all his seed all the families of the earth would be blessed (Gen. 12: 1-3), and of his promise to David that his throne and kingdom would be established forever before the Lord (2 Sam. 7:16).”¹³⁴

The account of Jesus’ birth begins in Matt. 1:18. In verses 22-23 of that same passage, Matthew makes it perfectly clear that this is no ordinary birth. In fact, he references the Old Testament, in what scholars call Formula Citations of Scripture—an indication that an event in the New Testament took place in order to fulfill a particular passage found in the Old Testament.¹³⁵ In this instance (Matt. 1:22-23), the formula

¹³³Matt. 1:18-25, NKJV.

¹³⁴Michael Green, *The Message of Matthew* (Downers Grove, IL: Inter-Varsity Press, 2000), 57.

¹³⁵Raymond E. Brown, *The Birth of the Messiah* (New York: Doubleday, 1979), 96-97.

citation is Isa. 7:14: “Behold, the virgin shall be with child, and bear a son, and they shall call His name Immanuel, which is translated ‘God with us’.”¹³⁶ Not only is He God with us, but He is Jesus—Yahweh saves. He is the promised Messiah who has come to rescue the Jews. While these things are clearly stated in the Matthew narrative, questions remain concerning the circumstances of Jesus’ birth.

Before further exploring what biblical scholars have to say about Matthew 1:18-25, the researcher offers her own *Midrash*.¹³⁷ According to Jewish law, if a young woman was not a virgin when she married, “the elders of the city shall bring her to the door of her father’s house, and the men of her city shall stone her to death with stones, because she has done a disgraceful thing in Israel, to play the harlot in her father’s house.”¹³⁸ So one can only imagine how Mary must have felt when the angel told her that she would conceive a child. She knew the Jewish law and she knew that, although she was engaged to be married, she had not slept with a man. But who would believe her? She had a funny feeling—“was troubled”—just by the angel’s saying that she was highly favored. Who was she to be highly favored? What has she done to deserve a touch from an angel? Why now? And, why this kind of news? She always hoped that one day she would have a visitation from an angel; maybe an angel would tell her that she would never have to worry about anything, that she would have more money than she knew what to do with, that she was always going to be in perfect health, that her marriage to Joseph would be long and prosperous. But not this! This was her worst nightmare. Her heart was racing

¹³⁶Matt. 1:22-23, NKJV.

¹³⁷Frances M. Draper, unpublished *Midrash*, Matt. 1: 18-25, shared with the Woods-Thomas Fellows of UTS, Peer Session, Orlando, FL, October, 2005.

¹³⁸Deut. 22:20-21, NKJV.

and her palms were sweaty. She wanted to run away and hide; wanted to have a pity party; wanted to commit suicide; wanted not to believe what the angel was saying. What would her parents say? What would Joseph say? Would he be accused of forcing himself on her and then be condemned to death?¹³⁹ What about her friends and other family members?

And, Mary's conversation with Joseph, according to the researcher's *Midrash*, may have sounded something like this:

You won't believe what happened to me today? An angel named Gabriel appeared and said I was blessed and highly favored; that I was going to have a child. After I heard what he had to say, I felt anything but blessed and I certainly didn't feel favored. Come on Joseph don't look at me like that, you know that we haven't been together in a sexual way! We both love God and are committed to following His commands. I heard what the angel Gabriel said, but it's really much more than I can understand. You, too, had an angelic visit? What did he say? What? The Holy Spirit? Wow, the Holy Spirit must really be powerful. What? You believed the angel? Yes, I know how hard that must have been. I, too, (after the initial shock wore off) believed him. I know that you wanted to put me away "privily" at first, but I thank you for sticking with me; for not backing out; for being there for me. I am both scared and excited at the same time! We're going to be parents of a boy named Jesus who will save his people from their sins. What a tremendous responsibility. My soul doth magnify the Lord!¹⁴⁰

At first glance, there seems to be confusion surrounding the status of Mary and Joseph. In Matt. 1:18, Joseph and Mary are betrothed to one another; in Matt. 1:19 Joseph is "minded to put her away secretly" (to divorce her); and, in Matt. 1:24 Joseph takes Mary home as his wife.¹⁴¹ This sequence of events is quite different from the marriage customs that are practiced in the Western world today (i.e., a courtship, an engagement,

¹³⁹Ibid., 25.

¹⁴⁰Luke 1:46.

¹⁴¹Matt. 1:18, 19, 24.

and then a wedding). While a broken engagement may cause some angst for all concerned, it is not viewed the same as it was in the days of Mary and Joseph. Luke 1:5 sets these events during the reign of Herod the Great, a reign that scholars estimate lasted from 37- 4 B.C.¹⁴² In those days, Jewish marriage customs were prescribed. Before couples married, there was a betrothal—a pledge to marry. This betrothal represented a solemn contract between the prospective couple, and stayed in effect for an entire year before the marriage was consummated sexually.¹⁴³ Unlike engagements in the Western Hemisphere, a Jewish betrothal could only be terminated by a divorce. It was not to be entered into lightly. Interestingly, Deut. 22:24 refers to a betrothed woman as a *wife*, while just one verse earlier she was referred to as being *pledged to be married*.¹⁴⁴ This is the same context that the writer of Matthew uses to describe Mary in Matt. 1:19, 24.¹⁴⁵

In the Jewish marriage tradition, a marriage was not complete before one year of betrothal was finished. In fact, “if evidences of virginity are not found for the young woman [at the conclusion of the betrothal period], then they [the elders of the city] shall bring out the young woman to the door of her father’s house, and the men of her city shall stone her to death with stones because she has done a disgraceful thing in Israel, to play the harlot in her father’s house.”¹⁴⁶

¹⁴²“The Mary Page,” <<http://www.udayton.edu/mary/questions/faq/faq02.html>> (12 January 2006).

¹⁴³Green, *Message of Matthew*, 61.

¹⁴⁴Deut. 22:23-24.

¹⁴⁵Matt. 1: 19, 24.

¹⁴⁶Deut. 22:20-21, NKJV.

Looking closer at the Jewish marriage customs, it bears repeating that betrothal involved the establishment of a marriage covenant—a written document that detailed the rights of the bride and the promises of the groom. By Jesus' time it was usual for such a covenant to be established as the result of the prospective bridegroom taking the initiative.¹⁴⁷ The prospective bridegroom would travel from his father's house to the home of the prospective bride. There he would negotiate with the father of the young woman (it has been estimated that the average age of the bride was 12 ½ years old) to determine the price that he must pay to purchase his bride. This price was a reflection of the value of the bride.¹⁴⁸ Once the bridegroom paid the purchase price, known as the *mohar*, the marriage covenant was thereby established, and the couple was referred to as husband and wife.¹⁴⁹ From that moment on the bride was declared to be consecrated or sanctified, set apart exclusively for her bridegroom.¹⁵⁰ As a symbol of the covenant relationship that had been established, the groom and bride would drink from a cup of wine over which a betrothal benediction had been pronounced.¹⁵¹

After the marriage covenant had been established, the groom would leave the home of the bride and return to his father's house. There he would remain separate from

¹⁴⁷David R. Mace, *Hebrew Marriage* (New York: Philosophical Library, 1953), 167.

¹⁴⁸Isaac Landman, ed., *Marriage, The Universal Jewish Encyclopedia* (New York: The Universal Jewish Encyclopedia, Inc., 1948), 7:372.

¹⁴⁹Isidore Singer, ed., *Betrothal, The Jewish Encyclopedia* (New York: Funk and Wagnals Co., 1907), 3:126.

¹⁵⁰George F. Moore, *Judaism* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1946), 121.

¹⁵¹Landman, *Marriage*, 7: 373.

his bride for a period of one year.¹⁵² This period of separation afforded the bride time to plan and prepare for married life. It was a time of purification (*mikveh*), undistracted devotion and great anticipation. The groom occupied himself with the preparation of living accommodations in his father's house to which he could bring his bride.¹⁵³

At the end of the betrothal period, the groom would come (usually at night) to take his bride to live with him. The groom, best man and other male escorts would leave the groom's father's house and conduct a torch light procession to the home of the bride. Although the bride was expecting her groom to come for her, she did not know the exact time of his coming. As a result, the groom's arrival would be preceded by a shout that forewarned the bride to be prepared for the coming of the groom.¹⁵⁴

After the groom received his bride together with her female attendants, the enlarged wedding party would return from the bride's home to the groom's father's house where they would find the waiting wedding guests.¹⁵⁵ Shortly after arrival, the bride and groom would be escorted by the other members of the wedding party to the bridal chamber (*huppah*). Prior to entering the chamber, the bride remained veiled so that no one could see her face. While the groomsmen and bridesmaids would wait outside, the bride and groom would enter the bridal chamber alone. There, in the privacy of that

¹⁵²Ibid.

¹⁵³Ibid.

¹⁵⁴James Neil, *Everyday Life in the Holy Land* (New York: Cassell and Company, Limited, 1913), 251.

¹⁵⁵J. Jeremias, *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, ed. Gerhard Kittel, trans. and ed. Geoffrey W. Bromiley, IV (Grand Rapids: Wm B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1967), 1099-1100.

place, they could enter into physical union for the first time, thereby consummating the marriage that had been covenanted earlier.¹⁵⁶

After the marriage was consummated, the groom would announce the consummation to the other members of the wedding party waiting outside the chamber: "He who has the bride is the bridegroom; but the friend of the bridegroom, who stands and hears him, rejoices greatly because of the bridegroom's voice. Therefore this joy of mine is fulfilled."¹⁵⁷ The wedding party would pass on the news of the marital union to the wedding guests, and a seven-day feast would begin.¹⁵⁸ During the seven days of the wedding festivities, which were sometimes called "the seven days of the *huppah*," the bride remained hidden in the bridal chamber. At the conclusion of these seven days, the groom would bring his bride out of the bridal chamber, now with her veil removed, so that all could see who his bride was.¹⁵⁹

In Dr. Renald Showers' book, *Jewish Marriage Customs, Behold the Bridegroom Comes!*, a compelling analogy is made between Jewish marriage customs and Jesus' purpose for coming to earth. Dr. Showers writes:

- In the same manner as the Jewish bridegroom came to the bride's home for the purpose of obtaining her through the establishment of a marriage covenant, so Jesus came to earth for the purpose of obtaining the Church through the establishment of a covenant;

¹⁵⁶Landman, *Marriage*, 7:373.

¹⁵⁷John 3:29, NJKV.

¹⁵⁸Isaac Landman, ed., *Huppah, The Universal Jewish Encyclopedia*, (New York: The Universal Jewish Encyclopedia, Inc., 1948), 5:504.

¹⁵⁹*Ibid.*

- Parallel to the custom of the Jewish groom paying a price to purchase his bride, Jesus paid a price to purchase His bride, the Church. The price that He paid was His own life blood;
- Analogous with the Jewish bride being declared to be sanctified or set apart exclusively for her groom once the marriage covenant was established, the Church has been declared to be sanctified or set apart exclusively for Christ;
- In the same way that a cup of wine served as a symbol of the marriage covenant through which the Jewish groom obtained his bride, so the cup of communion serves as the symbol of the covenant through which Christ has obtained the Church;
- Just as the Jewish groom left the home of his bride and returned to his father's house after the marriage covenant had been established, so Jesus left the earth, the home of the Church, and returned to His Father's house in heaven after He had established the new covenant and risen from the dead;
- Corresponding with the period of separation between the Jewish groom and bride, Christ has remained separate from the Church for over 2000 years. The Church is now living in that period of separation;
- Parallel to the custom of the Jewish groom preparing living accommodations for his bride in his father's house during the time of separation, Christ has been preparing living accommodations for the Church in His Father's house in heaven during His separation from His Bride;
- In the same manner as the Jewish groom came to take his bride to live with him at the end of the period of separation, so Christ will come to take His Church to live with Him at the end of His period of separation from the Church;
- Just as the taking of the Jewish bride was accomplished by a procession of the groom and male escorts from the groom's father's house to the home of the bride, so the taking of the Church will be accomplished by a procession of Christ and an angelic escort from Christ's Father's house in heaven to the home of the Church;
- Analogous with the Jewish bride not knowing the exact time of the groom's coming for her, the Church does not know the exact time of Christ's coming for her;
- In the same way that the Jewish groom's arrival was preceded by a shout, so Christ's arrival to take the Church will be preceded by a shout;
- Similar to the Jewish bride's return with the groom to his father's house after her departure from her home, the Church will return with Christ to His Father's house in heaven after she is snatched from the earth to meet Him in the air;

heaven, thereby consummating their relationship that had been covenanted earlier.¹⁶⁰

Looking closer at this analogy, one cannot help but note the beauty of the relationship between Christ and his church. Bible teacher, Donald Barnhouse observes, “every time the gospel of Jesus Christ is declared, Christ is proposing that one enter into a covenant relationship with Him.”¹⁶¹ In essence, according to Barnhouse, Jesus is saying:

‘I, Jesus, take thee, sinner, to be My Bride. And I do promise and covenant before God The Father and these witnesses, to be thy loving and faithful Savior and Bridegroom; in sickness and in health, in plenty and in want, in joy and in sorrow, in faithfulness and in waywardness, for time and for eternity.’ If one accepts Christ’s proposal, then sins are forgiven, and he or she enters into a relationship that makes him or her part of His Bride, the Church. The proposal requires a response—a deliberate decision: ‘I, sinner, take Thee, Jesus, to be my Savior. And I do promise and covenant before God and these witnesses to be Thy loving and faithful Bride; in sickness and in health, in plenty and in want, in joy and in sorrow, for time and for eternity.’¹⁶²

When one covenants with God, through his Son Jesus Christ, it is truly an *I and Thou* relationship. This point returns us to the Joseph and Mary narrative. According to the gospel of Luke, Mary was living at Nazareth when Jesus’ conception by the Holy Spirit was announced by the angel Gabriel.¹⁶³ Both Luke and Matthew agree that Mary was a virgin betrothed to “a man named Joseph of the house of David.” But this was no

¹⁶⁰Renald Showers, chairman of the Pastoral Studies Dept. Philadelphia College of the Bible, “Jewish Marriage Customs, Behold the Bridegroom Comes!” (W. Collingswood, N.J: Friends of Israel Gospel Ministry, Inc., year unknown), available <www.Biblestudymanuals.net/jewish_marriage_customs.htm> (4 September 2005).

¹⁶¹Donald G. Barnhouse, *God’s Freedom* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1961), 191.

¹⁶²*Ibid.*

¹⁶³Luke 1:26.

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In Matt. 1:19, Matthew calls Joseph a just or a righteous man. While Luke focuses on God's revelation to Mary, Mathew focuses on the revelation to Joseph. Jewish men in Joseph's day usually married between the ages of 18 and 20 years old. So, while Joseph was a relatively young man (by today's standards), Matthew holds him in high regard by referring to him as righteous. One on-line Bible dictionary defines righteous as: “just according to the divine law; applied to persons, it denotes one who is holy in heart, and observant of the divine commands in practice; as a righteous man; the righteous, in scripture, denotes the servants of God, the saints.”¹⁶⁴ And, because Joseph was a just man, a righteous man, he did not simply jump to conclusions; rather he listened to the voice of the Lord. Catholic theologian, Raymond E. Brown points out that “four OT women were mentioned by Matthew in the genealogy as preparation for Mary's role as

¹⁶³Luke 1:26.

¹⁶⁴The King James Bible Page, *KJV Dictionary*. s.v., “Righteous,” available <<http://av1611.com/kjbp/kjv-dictionary/righteous.html>> (12 October 2005).

the instrument of the Holy Spirit in the begetting of the Messiah. But in two of those instances the men were not upright, Judah and David.”¹⁶⁵

Matthew is so intent in presenting Joseph as a person of impeccable moral character that he points out that even once he and Mary were married, they refrained from sexual relations until Jesus' birth.”¹⁶⁶ According to some observers, this would have taken considerable self-control. In many Middle Eastern societies, it was assumed that "if a man and woman are alone together for more than twenty minutes they have had intercourse.”¹⁶⁷

For Joseph to "put Mary away" meant that Joseph would have to divorce her. It was not possible, however, to have a secret divorce because "the writ of repudiation had to be delivered before two witnesses.”¹⁶⁸ Joseph did not have the option of giving Mary a second chance, even if he was inclined to do so. According to Jewish and Roman law, a man must divorce his wife if she is guilty of adultery. A husband who failed to divorce his unfaithful wife, under Roman law, would be accused of portraying his wife as a prostitute.¹⁶⁹ If he refused to divorce her, Joseph also knew that others would assume that he had gotten Mary pregnant. If he divorced her, on the other hand, his actions would be considered righteous. If she had "committed adultery" and he did not divorce her, he

¹⁶⁵Brown, *Birth of the Messiah*, 125.

¹⁶⁶Matt. 1:25, NKJV.

¹⁶⁷"When A Virgin Gave Birth," Inter-Varsity Press, New Testament Commentary, available <<http://www.Biblegateway.com/resources/commentaries>> (10 October 2005).

¹⁶⁸Brown, *Birth of the Messiah*, 128.

¹⁶⁹Ibid.

would be in violation of both the law and the custom of the day. His failure to divorce her, under those circumstances, also would bring shame to his household.¹⁷⁰

Not only could Joseph have *saved face* by divorcing Mary, but he could have recovered her dowry and maybe even the *mohar*, if he had divorced her publicly. However, Joseph was more interested in his relationship with God than with what others may have thought or said. In fact, one of the key factors in Joseph's decision was his "respect or awe for God's plan of salvation."¹⁷¹ When God reveals the truth to Joseph, through an angel of the Lord, he immediately believes and obeys God's will.¹⁷² This intimates a genuine relationship with God, one in which Joseph was fully in-tune with God's will for his life and his family. As a righteous man, Joseph valued obedience to God over his own comfort.

Unlike Abram in the Old Testament narrative discussed earlier, Joseph heeded the voice of God, rather than leaning to his own understanding or to the conventional thought of the culture. In order to hear from God, Joseph had to have what Buber would call regular "meetings with God"—a time when he was fully in the presence of the Almighty. As a result of Joseph's intimacy with God, it is this researcher's opinion that he also learned how to have an intimate *I-Thou* relationship with his wife, Mary, as the two joined together in obedience to God. The evidence of this relationship is in how he treated her: he valued her, he protected her, he stood by her at the risk of losing his own life, he understood the meaning of "and the two shall become one flesh."¹⁷³

¹⁷⁰Ibid.

¹⁷¹Brown, *Birth of the Messiah*, 126.

¹⁷²Gen. 1:24, NKJV.

¹⁷³Eph. 5:31.

CHAPTER FOUR

METHODOLOGY

It was hypothesized that biblically based premarital counseling will lead to improved conflict resolution, communication, relationship satisfaction/stability and an increased understanding of spirituality among and between engaged Christian couples.

Several research methodology options were considered including observations, case studies, focus groups, interviews and pre/posttests. However, in looking at the target population and considering the scope of this project, as well as the impending wedding dates of the participants, an on-line questionnaire was selected as the primary pre/post test instrument. Follow-up interviews also were conducted.

Prior to beginning field research, the researcher conducted a cursory review of the Internet and discovered that there were numerous on-line premarital surveys and questionnaires. However, the researcher wanted an instrument that would help premarital couples learn about specific strengths and challenges, in their relationships. In addition, the researcher was looking for an instrument that used a Likert scale. To that end, the researcher selected the on-line RELATE Institute's RELATE questionnaire which was developed by the Marriage Study Consortium at Brigham Young University (BYU) for engaged couples.¹ Founded in 1979, the Marriage Study Consortium is a non-profit organization with the specific tasks of developing research and outreach tools that can be

¹The RELATE Institute, "RELATE Questionnaire" (Brigham Young University Marriage Study Consortium: Provo, UT, 1997), available <<http://www.relate-institute.org>> (10 January 2005).

used directly with the public and that the University can use to gather information about relationships. The Consortium consists of a group of scholars, researchers, family life educators, and counselors from varied religions and educational backgrounds whose life's work is around strengthening and understanding premarital and marital relationships.²

The RELATE questionnaire consisted of 271 items by which an individual assessed and described him/her self, their partner, their family, and their couple relationship. This comprehensive questionnaire focused on four major areas influencing marital satisfaction: personality/values, family and friend support, communication skills, and upbringing/background. In many instances, questions seeking the same type of information were simply asked in a different way to preserve internal consistency.³ From the more than 200 questions, the researcher chose twelve general themes/questions as the basis for her analysis.

The RELATE questionnaire was designed to assess key areas where it may be important for the couple to recognize and discuss their similarities and differences. RELATE questions are based upon research studies which cover factors that have been found premaritally to be related to later marital quality. However, according to the designers of the questionnaire, RELATE is not intended to predict the ultimate marital quality, success or satisfaction for a couple. Rather, RELATE is intended to provide

²The RELATE Institute, "About RELATE" (Brigham Young University Marriage Study Consortium: Provo, UT, 1997), available <<http://www.relate-institute.org>> (10 January 2005).

³Ibid.

information to the couple so that they can evaluate their relationship and make decisions regarding it.⁴

The version of RELATE used for this research project was released in late 1997. It is the third iteration of the instrument.⁵ According to the developers, the specific items used in RELATE either came from research instruments that have demonstrated adequate reliability and validity or were created and tested by the developers of RELATE based on research, theory or clinical experience.⁶

In early 2005 five engaged couples, who were either members of John Wesley A.M.E. Zion Church or engaged to a member of John Wesley A.M.E. Zion, were selected for inclusion in a premarital counseling group. While the researcher conducted many individual (one couple at a time) premarital counseling sessions in the past, this was the first time that the researcher conducted premarital counseling with a group. The participating couples ranged in age from 25 years old to 55 years old. Of the ten participants, three persons had been married before, and three of the men were at least ten years older than their fiancées. There were fourteen children between the five couples. Seven of the persons were members of the John Wesley A.M.E. Zion Church, two belonged to other "Methodist" churches and one did not belong to a church, but visited John Wesley occasionally. Of those who belonged to John Wesley, three held leadership positions in the church.

Each couple had an initial interview with the researcher, and was asked to complete a Confidential Background Information Form (developed by the researcher) and

⁴Ibid.

⁵Ibid.

⁶Ibid.

a Contract (also developed by the researcher), before being added to the group (see Appendix A). They were then asked to complete the RELATE questionnaire on line. The researcher set up a RELATE account for each couple, paid the \$10.00 required fee for each person and marked the results for “hold.” Results on “hold” simply meant that only the researcher could access the couples’ results and that the couple had to wait to meet with the researcher to review the results of their questionnaire. The researcher also took precautions to maintain the couples’ confidentiality by assigning a number to each couple. One of the unique things about the RELATE questionnaire is that, although the couples take the questionnaire as individuals, their results are paired and compared. The results of the pretest were discussed with each couple, prior to the beginning of the group premarital sessions.

The developers of the RELATE questionnaire provided seven very brief session outlines, for use with either individual couples or a group. However, the researcher opted to adapt exercises from a biblically-based premarital preparation manual, *Before You Say I Do*, by H. Norman Wright and Wes Roberts.⁷ This manual provided exercises that assisted in facilitating group discussion, as well as bible studies and other assignments that the couple completed outside of the group sessions. The couples met at the researcher’s home for eight sessions of one and one half to two hours each. While the researcher served as a group “facilitator,” the sessions were preplanned and outlines were distributed in advance of each session (see Appendix B). Topics discussed included, but were not limited to:

⁷H. Norman Wright and Wes Roberts, *Before You Say “I Do”* (Eugene, Ore: Harvest House Publishers, 1996).

- The Purpose and Definition of Marriage (Two Sessions) At the end of the second session, Personality Assessments (see Appendix B) were given and couples' personality attributes were compared to characteristics of well-known biblical characters)⁸;
- Love as a Basis for Marriage;
- Expectations and Goals in Marriage;
- Needs, Roles, responsibilities (including issues of intimacy);
- Effective communication and Conflict;
- Finances;
- Your Wedding Day.

As a culminating activity, the engaged couples joined “seasoned couples”—those who had been married three years or more—at the researcher’s home, to receive “Words of Wisdom.” Finally, each couple completed the posttest on line and then met with the researcher to review and compare their reports and to share “lessons learned.” In addition, the researcher discussed the details of the actual wedding ceremony with the couples who were planning weddings within the next year. At this time, the researcher also reviewed the wedding liturgy, as well as other plans (i.e., the venue, the music, and the wedding program). While most couples retained a wedding coordinator, the researcher reserved the right to review and approve the components of the actual ceremony.

⁸Adapted from Reginald Johnson’s *Your Personality and the Spiritual Life* (Gainesville, FL: Victor Books, 1995).

CHAPTER FIVE

FIELD EXPERIENCE

Five couples participated in this ministry project. While all expressed a desire to get married, all were not initially convinced that premarital counseling was necessary. At least one male participant expressed concern about confidentiality in a group setting. The researcher met with each couple for an initial interview and orientation. At that time, each couple reviewed the proposed group schedule, filled out a background questionnaire, signed a “contract,” and received instructions for filling out the RELATE questionnaire on line. Below is a demographic breakdown of the ten participants, by couple. The researcher was surprised that the wide variety in ages, number of children, and prior marital status did not negatively impact the group process. In fact, the group bonded by the second session, and everyone shared freely in the group sessions—even the person who initially had reservations about the process. It is speculated that the group bonded so quickly because all but three of the participants attend the John Wesley A.M.E. Zion Church and all of the participants knew at least one other person in the group (in addition to their fiancé/fiancée). If this had not been the case, the researcher would have utilized strategies to facilitate the group bonding process. In addition to the group demographics, the tables below give the pre/posttest results for the following areas: relationship satisfaction, communication, spirituality, roles and responsibilities, values, conflict resolution, kindness/flexibility, respect and love.

DEMOGRAPHICS

S=single, never married, D = divorced; Responses are listed as follows: the first demographic refers to the male and the second demographic refers to the female.

	Age	Marital status	No. of children	Education	Income
Couple 1	41, 29	D, S	3, 0	Associate degree, Graduate degree	\$50-74,000, \$50-74,000
Couple 2	25, 27	S,S	0,0	Bachelors degree, Bachelors degree	\$30-39,000, \$30-39,000
Couple 3	47, 29	D, S	3,0	High School diploma, Bachelors degree	\$50-\$74,999, \$40-\$49,999
Couple 4	35, 32	S,S	3,1	High School diploma, High School diploma	\$30-\$39,999, \$40-\$49,999
Couple 5	52, 37	D, S	4,5	Graduate degree, High School diploma	\$30-\$39,999, \$30-\$39,999

There were 271 items on the RELATE Questionnaire. However, many of the questions could be grouped under a few main headings. The questions selected were representative of what was covered during the group premarital sessions. To see a full list of questions and a sample of one couple's responses, refer to Appendix C. (Note: the same questionnaire was taken as a posttest).

Relationship Satisfaction: How satisfying is your overall relationship?

VS=very satisfying S=satisfying N=neutral D=dissatisfied VD=very dissatisfied

	VS	S	N	D	VD
Pre	60%	20%	10%	10%	
Post	50%	40%	10%		

The reason for the slight change may be due to the fact that, after completing the session on goals and expectations in marriage, participants had a better understanding of what it takes to have a satisfying relationship.

Communication: How often is communication a problem in your relationship?
VO=very often O=often S=sometimes R=rarely N=never

	VO	O	S	R	N
Pre	20%	30%	10%	30%	10%
Post	0	20%	20%	40%	20%

The change in the results may be based on the couples' having a better understanding of communication, as a result of the session on Communication and Conflict. The couples role played, practiced active listening, and learned how to send clear (calm) messages.

Spirituality: As a function of time spent in religious pursuits (prayer, church going, etc.), how important is spirituality to you?
VO=very often O=often S=sometimes R=rarely N=never

	VO	O	S	R	N
Pre	60%	20%	20%	0	0
Post	60%	30%	10%	0	0

All but two of the participants is active in his/her church. The pre/posttest change may be due to the heavy emphasis in the group session on what constitutes a biblically based marriage.

Roles and responsibilities in relationships: I do not like the idea that husbands and wives should have different household responsibilities. SD=strongly disagree D=disagree DE=it depends A=agree SA=strongly agree

	SD	D	DE	A	SA
Pre	30%	20%	40%	10%	
Post	10%	0	50%	40%	

This attitudinal change may be ascribed to the couples' better understanding of their roles in a marriage. The session on Needs, Roles and Responsibilities was a very interesting one—especially as it related to the concept of “submission.” This session also challenged traditional thinking around male/female roles and gave the couples an

opportunity to talk about their spiritual, emotional, social and physical (including intimacy) needs.

Most important value: What is most important to you? A=accomplishment SF=self fulfillment S=security F=fun WR= warm relations with others SR= self respect WRE= well respected

	A	SF	S	F	WR	SR	WRE
Pre		10%	20%	30%	20%		20%
Post		10%	20%	20%	30%	10%	10%

While there is a difference between pre and post test results, this question seemed more meaningful to the couples, as they discussed their individual result with the researcher. Of note, but not reflected in the data included here, was the breakdown between males and females. Most of the women selected either “Warm Relations with Others” or “Fun,” as their most important value pre and post. Most of the men in the group selected “Well Respected,” “Security,” or “Self-Respect” as their most important value, pre and post test. Interestingly, no one selected either “Accomplishment” or “Self-Respect” in the pretest. In the session on The Purpose and Definition of Marriage, the couples also completed a personality assessment, which may have contributed to how this question was answered on the posttest.

Conflict Resolution: During conflicts, how often do you and your partner minimize the use of criticism, defensiveness, contempt and emotional flooding for good conflict resolution? VO=very often O=often S=sometimes R=rarely N=never

	VO	O	S	R	N
Pre	20%	40%	30%	10%	0
Post	40%	30%	30%	0	0

This change suggests that couples received a clearer understanding of how to resolve conflicts. In the session on Conflict and Communication, couples seemed genuinely surprised to learn that they were not “the only ones” experiencing certain types

of conflicts in their relationships. They also responded well to opportunities to “role play” mock conflict situations and were eager to discuss and to “practice” conflict resolution techniques.

Kindness/ flexibility

How often do you feel that your partner exhibits the following measures of kindness towards you? VO= very often O= often S=sometimes R=rarely N=never Couples pre test response percentages are followed by post test response percentages (pre, post)

	VO	O	S	R	N
considerate	50%, 60%	20%, 30%	30%, 10%	0	0
loving	60%, 70%	30%, 20%	10%, 10%	0	0
kind	50%,50%	40%,50%	10%,0	0	0
friendly	50%, 60%	30%, 20%	20%, 20%	0	0

This shift in perception of kindness/flexibility may be due to couples having a better understanding of roles and responsibilities, as well as effective communication and conflict resolution skills.

Respect: I have no respect for my partner when we are discussing an issue. VO=very often O=often S=sometimes R=rarely N=never

	VO	O	S	R	N
Pre	10%	0	10%	10%	70%
Post	10%	0	10%	10%	70%

This was the only scale, where no one showed a difference pre/posttest. Most of the couples reported pre and post that they are very respectful of one another, when discussing an issue.

Love: I show a lot of love toward my partner. VO=very often O=often S=sometimes R=rarely N=never

	VO	O	S	R	N
Pre	50%	20%	20%	10%	
Post	50%	30%	20%		

There was a slight change pre/post test. Notably, everyone chose very often, often or sometimes and no one chose rarely or never (posttest). These changes may be due to a better understanding of individual roles, needs and responsibilities.

In addition to the RELATE questionnaire, the researcher conducted interviews with each couple to determine: (1) their feelings/attitudes about the process, in general; and, (2) what they believed was most helpful.

One hundred per cent of the participants said that they thought the process was beneficial to their understanding of marriage from a biblical perspective. Without exception, the couples felt that the home assignments enhanced their relationship with one another by encouraging them to study the Bible with their fiancé/fiancée, outside of the group session. The things that the overwhelming majority (90 per cent) said that they valued most were the group process, the biblical emphasis on relationships, learning effective communication and conflict resolution skills and the culminating activity. During the culminating activity, held at the researcher's home, the engaged couples received advice and from couples who had been married three years or more. Many of the soon-to-be married couples expressed surprise that the already-married couples (even those who had been married for ten years or more) experienced conflict from time to time. As one person remarked, "I've learned that it's not always what happens in a relationship, but how you respond to a particular situation."

These research findings showed that the group sessions, the RELATE questionnaire and the culminating activity enhanced participants' understanding of what it takes to have a satisfying marital relationship. One of the major outcomes of this project was that one couple decided to delay their marriage for another year. Another

couple decided to forego the traditional wedding ceremony and elope. They did not even tell the researcher of their decision, until three months after their wedding. When the researcher asked them what prompted them to elope, they said that they did not feel that God was pleased with their living arrangement (they had been living together for more than a year) so they went to the court house and exchanged their marriage vows. They are planning a wedding reception for the summer of 2006, and have asked the researcher to conduct a “blessing of our marriage” service beforehand. The other three couples were married by the researcher in late 2005.

Another outgrowth of the research project was a special consecration service held to honor and pray for newlyweds at the John Wesley Church. It was a very meaningful service, as the other married couples in the congregation embraced the newlyweds and pledged to love and support them, as they begin their new life together. Other newlywed couples from the community also participated in the service. The local black newspaper also covered the service (See Appendix D). In addition, the John Wesley A.M.E. Zion Church was one of sixteen community and faith based groups selected in 2006 to participate in a Peer Learning Network as part of a Healthy Marriage Initiative sponsored by CFWD and funded by the Annie E. Casey Foundation. This initiative will train two members from the John Wesley A.M.E. Zion Church on how to conduct premarital and relationship counseling with unmarried couples who either already have an infant or are expecting a child. The curriculum was developed by the Baltimore-based Center for Fathers, Families and Workforce Development.

CHAPTER SIX

REFLECTION, SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

Historically, African American marriages have been set up for failure. From slavery to reconstruction to the Civil Rights era until today, African American unions have been under attack. It is amazing that black families have any semblance of stability, given the way families were torn apart during slavery. However, while others attempted to strip them African American men and women of their dignity, they could not strip them of their faith. In the face of horrible and dehumanizing conditions, African Americans have always been people of faith. It was the church that gave them hope; the church that provided refuge in the time of struggle; the church that set the moral thermometer; and the church that still stands today.

As this project has documented, the divorce rate among African Americans is staggering. And, many young and not so young are electing to live together without the benefit of marriage—although they are members of a church. The number of female-headed households is growing, and so is the number of children born to parents who are not married to one another. When one surveys neighborhoods and churches, especially in major urban centers, it is apparent that too many people are opting not to get married. Surprisingly, United States President George W. Bush has made marriage a priority of his administration. While President Bush may be motivated—as some have suggested—solely by a desire to reduce the welfare rolls, the government's funding of marriage

enrichment programs has prompted strenuous debate in a variety of forums. And, in recent months the debate has escalated over the issue of same-sex unions and domestic partnerships. Again, for the purposes of this project, the researcher defines marriage as a legally sanctioned, biblically-based union between one man and one woman.

In a heavily financed media campaign that began in Baltimore, Maryland in 2005, billboards exclaimed the benefits of marriage: married couples earn more money, married couples are physically and psychologically healthier, married people live longer, married people have lower rates of substance abuse, and children of married parents do better in school. Yet, in the African American community—more so than the majority white community—marriage is at risk. In fact, the number of people who come to their pastor or others for help with marital relationship issues is significant. And, there are many more who decide to either get a divorce at the first sign of relationship troubles.

Most churches support marriage education, marriage enrichment and marriage preparation programs, yet too many do not appear to have an organized, systematic way to deliver those programs. Even though the rate of marriages has decreased in the African American community, many couples still desire marriage and most want to get married in a church. Pastors, other clergy and lay leaders often are so overwhelmed with other responsibilities that it is difficult to provide comprehensive premarital counseling to every couple who wants to get married. In some cases, premarital counseling is either conducted very hastily or not at all.

However, it is this researcher's contention that the sanctity of marriage is too important to God and to the well-being of the community to have a haphazard approach to marriage preparation. Most, if not all, clergy persons recognize that couples who are

not counseled before the marriage have a higher likelihood of being in their offices seeking marital counseling a few months after the marriage.

As a nationally certified pastoral counselor, this researcher has provided premarital counseling for nearly twenty years. However, this ministry project represented the first time that she has conducted premarital counseling in a group setting. It was also the first time that she used an on-line instrument to ascertain couples' understanding of marriage pre and post premarital counseling. The results were very interesting and enlightening.

The results of the on-line questionnaire afforded couples an opportunity to talk about how they perceived themselves and their prospective spouses. Some couples were surprised to learn that they had so much in common. Others were just as surprised to learn how their fiancé/fiancée felt about certain issues i.e. their values. Given the plethora of questionnaires and surveys on-line, the researcher was pleasantly surprised to find that the RELATE was so useful. It was easy to administer, scoring was done in a few seconds, and the couples reported that they appreciated the thoroughness of the questionnaire—even though it took an average of forty minutes per person to complete.

While many relationship issues were discussed during the eight week group process, the researcher is aware that there are so many more issues that could have been included (i.e., domestic violence, substance abuse, male-female relationships in the workplace, etc.). However, time did not permit the researcher to discuss these areas in detail, and the on-line questionnaire did not assess for these variables. However, if time was not an issue, it would have been very interesting to include one or two other

variables. It also would be beneficial to track these couples over a longer period of time, and to give them another assessment in three to five years.

The group sessions were extremely helpful to the researcher and to the members of the group. Five couples was an ideal number for a group of this type—not too small and not too large. The group bonded almost instantly and took on a life of its own. The couples monitored and supported one another. They even worked out a “refreshment rotation” where a different couple was responsible for bringing refreshments to each session. It was a joy to watch the couples’ progress over a six month period. It also was a joy to marry three of the couples, shortly after their counseling was completed. And, it was gratifying to know that one of the couples realized that they were not quite ready to marry, and therefore decided to wait another year. One couple decided to elope, but is planning a reception and a “marriage blessing ceremony” in the summer of 2006.

While the changes reflected in the research were modest, the results support the researcher’s hypothesis that relationships are strengthened when engaged couples receive biblically-based premarital counseling. A wonderful side benefit of working with the couples in the researcher’s home was the strengthening of her own marriage. Although the researcher and her husband felt that their marriage of over thirty years was strong, the researcher’s husband participated in two of the sessions and offered encouragement to the engaged couples. Having the sessions in a home, rather than in a church building created a relaxed atmosphere. The closing activity also was held at the researcher’s home. However, for some pastors, a home may not be available for the sessions. It is suggested, therefore, that those conducting premarital counseling in the church pay attention to the “setting.” A small, intimate room (not the pastor’s study) where distractions are

minimized is preferable. While tables are useful for note taking, one or two round tables (where the engaged couple can sit next to one another) are preferable. Lighting should be adequate, but not overwhelming and of course cell phones should be turned off.

Another added benefit is that the couples (the four who have married, as well as the one who will be marrying next year) have formed an informal support network, and continue to keep in contact with each other outside of church. In addition, at least two other couples in the church have expressed a desire to get married in the near future. The researcher, therefore, is planning to train others—clergy and lay persons—on how to conduct effective marriage preparation sessions.

To that end, the John Wesley A.M.E. Zion Church has been selected by the Center for Fathers, Families and Workforce Development (a local non-profit) to participate in a Peer Learning Network designed to teach faith based and community organizations how to promote healthy relationships among low-income Baltimore parents—in hopes that the couples will decide to marry. This is a unique program that is going on simultaneously in a handful of other cities in the United States.

It is this researcher's prayer that more churches will take an active part in promoting healthy marriages through well-thought out premarital preparation ministries. Marriage does work, but it takes work—especially preparation. God longs for an intimate relationship with his creation and for his creation to have a genuine *I and Thou* (as Martin Buber would say) relationship with Him. Jesus, in Matthew 22:37-40, boldly proclaims the ultimate relationship model: *Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind. This is the first and great commandment. And the second is like unto it, Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself.*

APPENDIX A

OVERVIEW, CONTRACT AND BACKGROUND INFORMATION

John Wesley AME Zion Church
1923 Ashland Avenue
Baltimore, Maryland 21205
410-732-7020
Rev. Frances "Toni" Draper, Pastor

Premarital Counseling Overview

"For this cause shall a man leave his father and mother, and shall be joined unto his wife, and they two shall be one flesh." Ephesians 5:31

Christian marriage is the total commitment of two people to the person of Jesus Christ and to each other. Marriage is a pledge of fidelity and a partnership of mutual submission.

Many couples spend more time on wedding preparations than they do on preparing for one of the most significant and sacred experiences that they will ever have. Therefore, it is imperative that couples receive solid, biblically based counseling before the marriage.

I pray that our time together will help you to have a better understanding of God's prescription for a healthy and happy marriage, and that you will approach our session prayerfully and purposefully.

We will meet for eight to ten, 1 ½ hour sessions where we will discuss a variety of topics. In order for our time together to be productive as possible, both parties must be present. Additionally, you will be asked to complete written exercises, in advance of each session. Some of these exercises are in the form of bible studies that you as a couple will complete together.

Below is a tentative outline of the topics that we will discuss (Note: Some sessions may take more than one week to complete☺)

Orientation

Session 1 -- The Purpose & Definition of Marriage
 Session 2 -- The Purpose & Definition of Marriage (Part 2)
 Session 3 - Understanding Your Spiritual Personality
 Session 4-- Love as a Basis for Marriage
 Session 5-- Expectations and Goals in Marriage
 Session 6-- Needs, Roles, and Responsibilities
 Session 7 -- Communication and Conflict
 Session 8-- Finances

Closing Session

Note: Each couple will meet individually with Pastor Toni before the group sessions begin and at the conclusion of the group sessions. During the last individual meeting details regarding the wedding ceremony will be discussed.

Resource: *Before You Say, I Do* by Wes Roberts and H. Norman Wright

John Wesley A.M.E. Zion Church
Rev. Frances "Toni" Draper, Pastor

Premarital Counseling Contract

We, the undersigned, desire to get married and we are hereby seeking premarital counseling. We affirm that we have committed our lives to Jesus Christ and that we are seeking a better understanding of God's requirements for a Christian marriage.

We, therefore, commit to eight to ten premarital counseling sessions and we agree to complete all assignments in advance of each session. If we cannot attend a session, one of us will call Rev. Draper (410-732-7020, church, or 410-444-4483, home) at least 24 hours in advance to reschedule. We agree to pay \$_____ per session, at the conclusion of each session.
Note: The fee is waived for members of John Wesley A.M.E. Zion Church.

We understand that, if serious, unresolved issues arise during the eight to ten week period, more sessions may be necessary. Depending on the circumstances, these additional sessions may conflict with the date that we have set for the wedding. While the decision to attend extended sessions is ours, we understand that refusal to do so may result in our making alternate arrangements, i.e. securing the services of another minister.

We thank God for His love for us and His provision for a healthy, happy, and fruitful marriage.

Signed:

_____ Date: _____

_____ Date: _____

_____ Date: _____
Rev. Frances "Toni" Draper

**John Wesley AME Zion Church
Premarital Counseling
Confidential Background Information**

Name _____ Date of Birth _____

Address _____

Home Tel. _____ Work Tel. _____

Mobile/Pager E-mail _____

Living With _____

Children (Names and Ages) _____

Occupation _____

Place of Employment/Work hours _____

Highest level of education _____

Married before? _____ If yes, when and for how long _____

If yes, why did marriage end? _____

How long have you and your fiancé known each other? _____

How did you meet? _____

Are you currently living together? _____ If so, for how long? _____

Have you and your fiancé ever broken up? _____ If so, when and for how long? _____

What is (was) the marital status of your parents? _____ If married, how long? _____

On the back, list at least five reasons (in priority order) you are marrying your fiancé?
Then, list five reasons (in priority order) you believe he or she is marrying you?

Are you saved? _____ For how long? _____

Church affiliation _____ How long? _____

Ministries involved in _____

APPENDIX B

SESSION OUTLINES

Premarital Counseling
Session One
The Purpose and Definition of Marriage

Read Genesis 2:18-25

1. Who originated marriage?
2. What are the purposes of marriage, and why was it originated? (Genesis 1:28; 2:18, Ephesians 5:22,23)
3. How is marriage good? (Genesis 2:18; Hebrews 13:4)
4. What is a helpmeet?
5. What does leaving mother and father involve?
6. What do the words "shall cleave" or "will be united," mean?
7. What do the words "be one flesh" mean to you?
8. List 4-6 ways that you could promote and maintain the oneness characteristic of your marriage?

Premarital Counseling
Session Two
The Purpose and Definition of Marriage (Continued)

1. List 3 of the most important Scripture verses upon which you would like to build your marriage relationship. (Please use passages other than Ephesians 5:21-33; I Corinthians 13; and I Peter 3:1-7)

2. Read Matthew 7:24-27. List what you believe are ten firm foundations which will go into making a solid marriage relationship.

3. What will you receive out of marriage that you wouldn't receive by remaining single?

4. Evaluate your "marriageability" by examining the personality traits of yourself and your fiancé. List eight character or personality traits that you feel would help a marriage.

5. Read over the "Fruit of the Spirit" as listed in Galatians 5:22,23. Would these traits, manifested in a person, increase the potential of success in marriage? If so, indicate which of these you manifest and which of them you are still having difficulty displaying.

Assignment: Please bring your completed inventory "Understanding Your Spiritual Personality" to the next session.

Premarital Counseling

Session Three

Understanding Your Spiritual Personality

*Based on the book Your Personality and the Spiritual Life by Dr. Reginald Johnson.

By discovering our own spiritual personality type, we can appreciate our God-given attributes, identify some of our special areas of vulnerability and weakness, and discover the kinds of resources which might be most conducive for nurturing our relationship with Christ. Attached is a Personality Type concepts Exercise * which is designed to help you to understand the four preference "scales" of the Myers-Briggs Personality Type Theory. It will enable you to begin to think about the application of that theory to your own life. *This is only an exercise*, not a scientifically designed instrument.

INSTRUCTIONS: This Personality Type Exercise is divided into four sections: Orientation, Perception, Decision-Making and Lifestyle.

- A. Each section contains 8 either/or type questions, which relate to opposite kinds of behaviors or traits. Using the scale below, assign a number, from 1 to 5, which best indicates your preferred ways of living:
 5 = always true for me; 4 = True most of the time; 3 = True about half of the time; 2 = Sometimes true; 1 = Only occasionally true. You may assign a number to each statement, if you believe that both descriptions would apply to you. However, it is o.k. to assign a number to just one of the preferences.

Example:

Are you easily bored when
 order to your are alone?
 thoughts?

4

Or, do you enjoy solitude in
 spend time on your own

1

The 4 indicates that you have a fairly strong preference in that direction, while the 1 shows that you have only a slight tendency in the opposite direction.

- B. Always go with your first response.
- C. Try to respond in terms of how you prefer to live, not how you think you should live. Try to express your own preference and not mirror what you think others expect of you, or even what your home, job or church situation demand from you.
- D. After you have completed the exercise, add up each column. When you are finished, you will have 8 different scores ranging from 0 to 40 for each column. For example, if you assigned a 5 to each of the 8 items, under Orientation that appear on the left hand side, your score will equal 40. If you did not assign a number to any item on the right hand side of the Orientation scale, then your score will be zero.

Personality Type Concepts Exercise
(Based on the Myers Briggs Personality Type Theory)

5 = Always true for me
2 = Sometimes true

4 = True most of the time
1 = Only occasionally true

3 = True about half of the time

ORIENTATION

1. Do you find that your attention flows naturally to the people and things around you?
2. Would you characterize yourself as outgoing?
3. Is your energy renewed by being with others?
4. Are you rather easy to get to know?
5. Do you find it easy to think out loud?
6. Are you rather expressive of your feelings?
7. When you are under stress, do you seek the company of others in order to sort things out?
8. Do you tend to act first and think later?

PERCEPTIONS

1. Do you depend on your 5 senses in order to gather data about what's happening?
 2. Do you prefer straightforward ways of speaking and writing- the more specific and concrete the better?
- Or, do you find that, whenever possible you prefer to occupy yourself with you own inner world of thoughts and ideas?
- Or, would you describe yourself as basically a reserved person?
- Or, even though you enjoy others' presence, do you find that you need solitude to recharge your batteries?
- Or, are you reluctant to let others into your private world?
- Or, do you feel that you need to turn inward in order to collect and organize your thoughts before you speak?
- Or, do you mostly keep your feelings to yourself?

Or, when under stress, do you require a measure of seclusion so that you can pull things together?

Or, do you tend to reflect and reflect and (perhaps) eventually get around to action?

Or, do you rely more on your intuitions and hunches in order to form impressions about what's going on?

Or, do you like a speaker or writer to use images and symbols, which allow you to engage your own imagination?

3. Are you an observer of tradition, one who does not easily break with custom?

4. Does the here and now keep your attention?

5. Do you have trouble seeing the forest for the trees?

6. Are you a practical sort of person with a common sense approach to things?

7. If someone hangs a new picture or puts a new plant on the table, will you almost always notice it?

8. Are you a steady, dependable kind of person who can be counted on for the long haul?

DECISION-MAKING

1. Are you generally secure in basing your decisions on an objective analysis weighing the pros and cons of a situation?

2. Can you usually get on with your job, regardless of relational harmony?

3. Does making a critical evaluation come more naturally for you than speaking an appreciative word?

4. When forced to choose, do you place truthfulness about tactfulness?

5. Do you find that your contribution to a group often lies in your ability to help people see objectively?

Or, are you able to break with tradition whenever it seems restrictive and to lay aside customs, which seem too cumbersome for a new situation?

Or, are you fascinated by what could be, and find that those possibilities occupy your thoughts?

Or, are you a person who often cannot see the trees for the forest?

Or, are you an ingenious and inventive sort of person with a creative approach to things?

LIFESTYLE

Or, are you often rather unobservant of your surroundings?

Or, do you tend to work by inspiration and find that when your vision for a task fades, so does your energy?

Or, regardless of the pros and cons score, are you more secure when you feel that your decision is being based on values, which are important to you and to others?

Or, do you find that harmonious relationships are essential for you to function effectively in a situation?

Or, are you more spontaneous with any appreciative word than with a critical evaluation?

Or, when you face a crunch, do you place tactfulness about truthfulness?

Or, do you find your contribution to others usually flows from your ability to empathize and to help people stay mindful of others' feelings?

6. In conversations, are you more concise than expressive?

7. Do you believe that people are more apt to make the wrong move if they go with their heart rather than their head?

8. Are you more impersonal, with more interest in things than in people?

1. Do you prefer to plan your work and work your plan?

2. Do your basic contributions to a group often stem from being systematic, orderly, planned and decisive?

3. Do you enjoy bringing things to completion -- finishing the task?

4. Do you like to get the information you need and bring things to a decisive conclusion?

5. Are you the sort of person who likes having standard operation procedures and set routines for doing things?

6. Would the phrase "A place for everything and everything in its place" be descriptive of your lifestyle?

7. It is unsettling for you to have matters up in the air and undecided?

8. It is a greater weakness for a person to be too laid-back than for a person to be too task-oriented?

Or, in conversations, are you more expressive than concise?

Or, do you believe that people are more likely to make the wrong move if they go with their head rather than their heart?

Or, are you more personal, with more interest in people than in things?

Or, do you like to leave your schedule open so that you can respond to changing events?

Or, are the attributes you bring to a group include spontaneity, open-mindedness, tolerance and adaptability?

Or, do you like the feeling of getting new things started and having many things going at the same time?

Or, is it hard for you to come to closure because you are unsure when you've ever gathered sufficient information?

Or, do you prefer trying out new and fresh ways of doing recurring tasks so that you won't get into a rut?

Or, are you more scattered and disorganized in your ways?

Or, do you prefer keeping your options open for as long as possible, so you won't miss something?

Or, do you think that it may be a greater weakness when one is too task-oriented than for the person to be too laid-back?

UNDERSTANDING YOUR SPIRITUAL PERSONALITY *

- I. Understanding Ourselves – Psalms 139: 1-3, 13-14
 - A. Perceptual Differences
 - B. Motivational Differences
 - C. Needs Versus Values
 - D. Personality Differences

- II. Understanding Others - Matthew 7:1-5
 - A. David - The Energizer (ESTP and ESFP)

1. Action- oriented	4. Tolerant and open
2. Adaptable and practical	5. Gullible
3. Affable and generous	6. Show-off
	7. Shallow

 - B. Mark – The Stabilizer (ISTJ and ISFJ)

1. Practical and factual	4. Self-absorbed
2. Prudent	5. Suspicious
3. Methodical	6. Perfectionistic

 - C. Joshua – The Crusader (ENFP and ENTP)

1. Creative	4. Unfocused
2. Symbolic	5. Stubborn
3. Visionary	6. Flighty

 - D. John - The Renewer (INFJ and INTJ)

1. Deep	4. Innovative
2. Creative	5. Lonely
3. Inspired	6. Restless
	7. Susceptible

 - E. Solomon- The Organizer (ESTJ and ENTJ)

1. Leader	4. Decisive
2. Structured	5. Impersonal
3. Goal-oriented	6. Routine
	7. Tunnel vision

 - F. Matthew- The Analyzer (ISTP and INTP)

1. Undergirded	4. Committed
2. Logical	5. Insensitive
3. Reserved	6. "Lazy"
	7. Emotionally explosive

 - G. Ruth- The Encourager (ESFJ and ENFJ)

1. Courageous conscientious	3. Considerate and
2. Loyal	4. Practical and responsible
	5. Hypersensitive

H. Luke – The Enhancer (ISFP and INFP)

- | | |
|------------------|---------------------------|
| 1. Purposeful | 4. Artistic |
| 2. Humble | 5. Optimistic |
| 3. Compassionate | 6. Feelings of inadequacy |
| | 7. Closed |

III. Understanding Jesus

- A. His outer life led Him to His inner life.
- B. His keen observations led to deeper understandings.
- C. His adaptability led to the appropriate use of thinking and feeling
- D. His ability to do as the occasion required led to a balanced life.

*Adapted from *Your Personality and the Spiritual Life* by Reginald Johnson

Premarital Counseling
Session 4
Love as a Basis for Marriage

1. Look at some of the following passages of Scripture to discover love from God's perspective. What is the central thought or example in each passage?
 - a. Proverbs 17:17
 - b. Matthew 6:24
 - c. Matthew 22:37-39
 - d. Luke 6:27-35
 - e. Luke 10:25-37
 - f. John 3:16
 - g. John 13:34
 - h. Romans 13:8-10
 - i. Romans 14:15
 - j. I Corinthians 8:1
 - k. Galatians 2:20
 - l. Galatians 5:13
 - m. Galatians 6:2
 - n. Ephesians 4:2
 - o. Ephesians 5:2
 - p. Ephesians 5:25
 - q. Titus 2:3-5
 - r. I Peter 4:8
 - s. I John 3:16-18

2. I Corinthians 13:4-7 gives the Bible's definition of love. Give two creative examples of how each could be applied in your marriage. Be specific.
 - a. Suffers long – endures offenses, is not hasty, waits for the Lord to right all wrongs.
 - b. Is kind—not inconsiderate, seeks to help, is constructive, blesses when cursed, helps when hurt, demonstrates tenderness
 - c. Is not envious, but content – is not jealous of another person's success, is not competitive
 - d. Is not arrogant, but humble – is not haughty, but lowly and gracious.
 - e. Is not boastful, but reserved – does not show off, try to impress, want to be the center of attraction
 - f. Is not rude, but courteous
 - g. Is not selfish, but self-forgetful
 - h. Is not irritable, but good tempered
 - i. Is not vindictive or wrathful, but generous
 - j. Does not delight in bringing another person's sins to light, but rejoices when another person obeys the truth.
 - k. Is not rebellious, but brave; conceals rather than exposes another person's wrongdoings to others.
 - l. Is not suspicious but trustful, not cynical, makes every allowance, looks for an explanation that will show the best in others.
 - m. Is not despondent, but hopeful, does not give up because it has been deceived or denied.
 - n. Is not conquerable, but invincible – can outlast problems.

Premarital Counseling
Session 5
Expectations and Goals in Marriage

1. In order to understand me, this is what you need to know about my family life as I was growing up.
2. If I could have changed one thing about my family life as I was growing up, it would have been...
3. Because I want or don't want this to occur in my own marriage and family life I will...
4. My parents have influence my attitudes toward marriage by ...
5. Something from my parents' marriage that I would like to have in mine is...
6. Something from my parents' marriage that I prefer not having in mine is...

Talk with your fiancé and list, on a separate piece of paper, ten similarities and ten differences between his home and family life and yours. Discuss these together. How will any of these affect your own marriage?

Write how you believe you would react to the following circumstances which could cause changes in your marriage:

1. A miscarriage
2. Death of a child
3. Major financial difficulty
4. Being fired from a job
5. Wife working instead of husband

6. Major personal illness
7. Being involved in a major lawsuit of potentially great financial loss and severe emotional stress
8. Living in an apartment instead of the home you were in for five years
9. Living in the country instead of the city
10. Husband (or wife) quitting his (or her) job to go into business for himself (or herself)?
11. Child does not turn out the way you wanted
12. Three more children than you planned on having
13. Discovering that you cannot have children
14. A friend begins making passes at you or your spouse
15. In-laws hostile toward you
16. Spouse now has to work nights instead of days
17. Car is stole while on vacation
18. Finding yourself attracted to another person
19. Spouse is no longer interested in spiritual things

Premarital Counseling
Session 6
Needs, Roles and Responsibilities

1. What are your needs for each of the following? What can your spouse do to fulfill those needs? Can you identify any Scriptures that speak to any of these needs?

Physical/Sexual

Emotional

Spiritual

Social

Intellectual

2. What does the Word of God say concerning the role of the wife and the role of the husband? Ephesians 5:21-23
3. What do the words “as unto the Lord” (v.22) suggest about the wife’s role?
4. Are there any limits placed upon the wife’s submission by Col. 3:18 and Acts 5:29?
5. According to v.33 (Ephesians 5), what should the wife’s attitude be toward her husband and what does this mean in everyday life?
6. Write a definition (in your own words) of “submission.”
7. What is the husband’s role? Is submission ever a part?
8. What example should the husband exhibit?
9. What are the ways in which Christ loved the church? Relate each of these to the way a husband should love his wife?

Premarital Counseling
Session 7
Communication and Conflict

How will you communicate in the following situations?

1. It's Saturday. Your spouse asks you to shop for something, but you really don't want to go. You say:
2. You are trying to watch your favorite TV program but your spouse is continually interrupting and asking you questions. The program is at the critical part and you don't want to miss it. You say:
3. You are describing to your spouse the most exciting event of the day. Right in the middle of it your spouse yawns and says, "I think I'll go get something to drink." You say:
4. Your spouse serves you breakfast. You notice the bacon is overcooked, which you don't like. The toast is served lightly toasted with fresh butter, which is exactly what you like. You say:

What does the Word of God say about communication? Look up the passages listed and write the key thought for each one. You will notice that the verses are listed in groupings, as there is a central theme in each group. See if you can discover the central thought for each group and write it as a summary.

- | | | |
|----|---|--|
| 1. | Proverbs 11:9
Proverbs 12:18
Proverbs 15:4
Proverbs 18:8
Proverbs 18:21 | Proverbs 25:11
Proverbs 26:22
James 3:8-10
I Peter 3:10 |
| 2. | Proverbs 4:20-23
Proverbs 6:12, 14, 18
Proverbs 15:28 | Proverbs 16:2
Proverbs 16:23 |
| 3. | Proverbs 15:31
Proverbs 18:13
Proverbs 18:15 | Proverbs 19:20
Proverbs 21:28
James 1:19 |

- | | | |
|-----|---|---|
| 4. | Proverbs 12:18
Proverbs 14:29
Proverbs 15:28
Proverbs 16:32 | Proverbs 21:23
Proverbs 26:4
Proverbs 29:20 |
| 5. | Proverbs 15:23 | Proverbs 25:11 |
| 6. | Proverbs 10:19
Proverbs 11:12, 13
Proverbs 13:3
Proverbs 17:27, 28 | Proverbs 18:2
Proverbs 20:19
Proverbs 21:23 |
| 7. | Proverbs 17:9 | Proverbs 21:9 |
| 8. | Proverbs 15:1
Proverbs 15:4 | Proverbs 16:1
Proverbs 25:15 |
| 9. | Proverbs 12:16 | Proverbs 19:11 |
| 10. | Proverbs 12:17, 22
Proverbs 16:13
Proverbs 19:5
Proverbs 26:18, 19
Proverbs 26:22 | Proverbs 28:23
Proverbs 29:5
Ephesians 4:15, 25
Colossians 3:9 |

Premarital Counseling
Session 8
Finances

List, in order of importance, five areas where you should currently be spending your money.

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.
- 4.
- 5.

If someone gave you a gift of \$10,000, how would you spend it?

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.
- 4.
- 5.

How would your fiancé spend it?

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.
- 4.
- 5.

What do the following passages say about how to acquire, how to regard and how to spend money? What principle do you derive from each one?

Deuteronomy 8:17, 18	Luke 6:27-38
I Chronicles 29:11, 12	Luke 12:13-21
Proverbs 11:24, 25	Romans 13:6-8
Proverbs 12:10	Ephesians 4:28
Proverbs 11:28	Philippians 4:11-10
Proverbs 13:11; 14:23	2 Thessalonians 3:7-12
Proverbs 24:30-34	I Timothy 6:6-10
Ecclesiastes 5:10	I Timothy 6:17-19
Ecclesiastes 5:19	Hebrews 13:5
Matthew 6:19, 20	Proverbs 13:18, 22
Matthew 17:24-27	Proverbs 15:16, 17, 22

Work together on a budget for the months of _____ and _____.
 Keep expense categories simple.

APPENDIX C
SAMPLE RELATE QUESTIONNAIRE
WITH PRETEST RESULTS
SUMMARY PROFILE
AND
DETAILED RESPONSES

Summary Profile

COUPLE # 2 (M-2 and F-2)

PRETEST



RELATE
A COMMUNITY RELATIONS FIRM

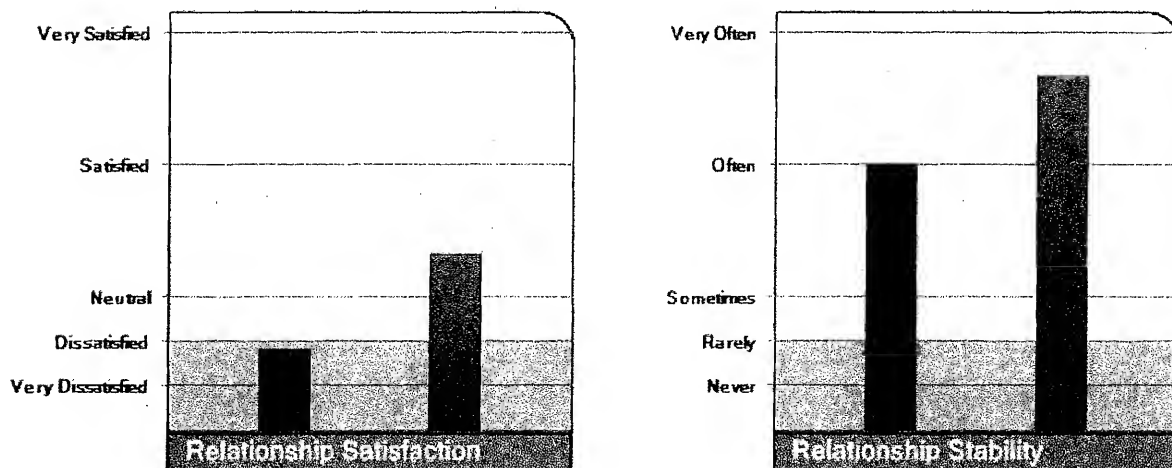
Graph Interpretation

Each graph in this report will have either two or four bars demonstrating the level to which you fit a given scale. The first and last bars will portray how each of you portrays yourselves on a given scale. If there are four bars, the middle two bars portray how each of you sees your partner in the same area. The box below shows what data each bar color represents.

Graph Legend

Bar #1	M-2 describes M-2
Bar #2	M-2 describes F-2
Bar #3	F-2 describes M-2
Bar #4	F-2 describes F-2

Relationship Satisfaction and Stability



The graphs above show how each of you rated your relationship satisfaction and stability (e.g., how often you have considered breaking-up). These overall evaluations of your relationship generally reflect the relative total of strengths and challenges in specific parts of your relationship. Research has found that the more satisfying a relationship is, the more likely it will be stable. However, it is possible to be unsatisfied, but stable. Research also shows that even the best of relationships experience some fluctuation in satisfaction over the course of the relationship.

Relationship Satisfaction

The physical intimacy you experience.
 The love you experience.
 How conflicts are resolved.
 The amount of relationship equality you experience.
 The quality of your communication.
 Your overall relationship with your partner.

M-2

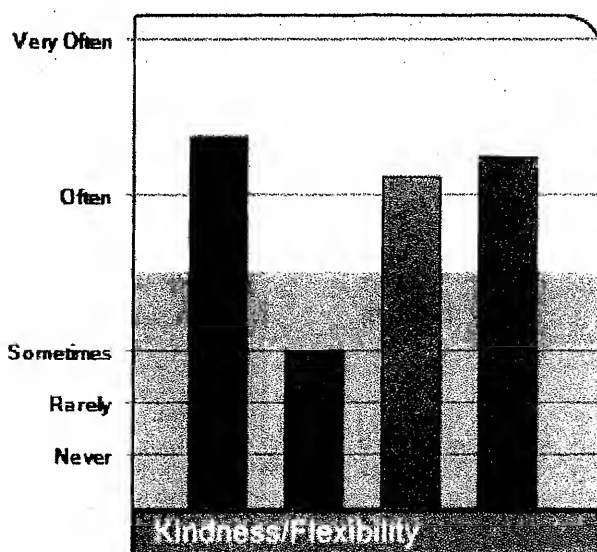
Dissatisfied
 Dissatisfied
 Dissatisfied
 Dissatisfied
 Very Dissatisfied
 Dissatisfied

F-2

Satisfied
 Satisfied
 Dissatisfied
 Satisfied
 Dissatisfied
 Satisfied

Profile Scales

Kindness/Flexibility



The **Kindness/Flexibility scale** measures your own and your partner's levels of kindness and flexibility.

Strength Area (Green): People who score in the green area of this scale see themselves and/or their partners as being kind, considerate, adaptable, and easygoing.

Challenge Area (Red): People who have kindness and flexibility scores in the red area are more likely to be in relationships that are less satisfying. People rating themselves and/or their partners in the challenge area on this scale may want to evaluate their ways of interacting to see how they can increase the levels of kindness, flexibility, and consideration in their relationships.

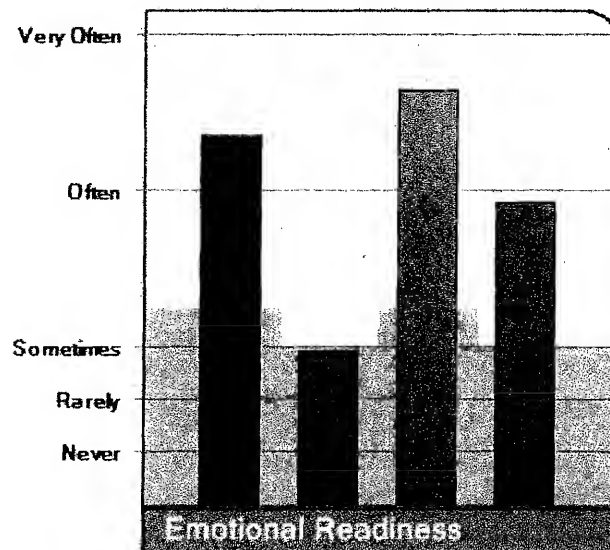
RELATE Institute Findings: In research with couples, the higher the levels of kindness and flexibility, the higher the levels of effective communication and positive conflict resolution. Perceptions of partner's kindness and flexibility are particularly important for predicting couples' relationship quality.

Emotional Readiness

The **Emotional Readiness scale** is a measure of your own and your partner's levels of maturity, calmness, self-esteem, and depression.

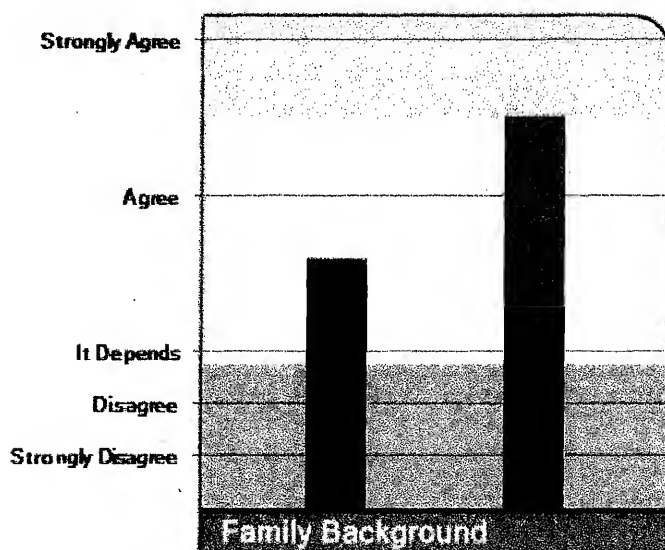
Strength Area (Green): People who score in the green area on this scale see themselves and/or their partners as being calm, mature, high in self-esteem and low on depression.

Challenge Area (Red): People who have emotional readiness scores in the red area are more likely to be in a relationship that is less satisfying. People scoring in the challenge area on this scale may have seriously high levels of anxiety, depression and other emotional problems and may benefit from assistance by a professional therapist.



RELATE Institute Findings: Low emotional readiness has been shown to be related to higher levels of criticism and defensiveness in couple relationships, as well as to lower relationship stability.

Family Background



The **Family Background scale** measures your own and your partner's perceptions of the quality of the emotional climate in the home you grew up in, the quality of your parents' marriage, and how much your family experience influences your current views about relationships.

Strength Area (Green): People who score in the green area of this scale see their families as emotionally healthy, their parents' marriages as strong, and their current relationships with parents are healthy and encouraging.

Challenge Area (Red): People who have family background scores in the red area are more likely to be in relationships that are less satisfying. People rating themselves in the challenge area on this scale may want to look for ways to strengthen their relationships with extended family and come to terms with negative experiences in their past.

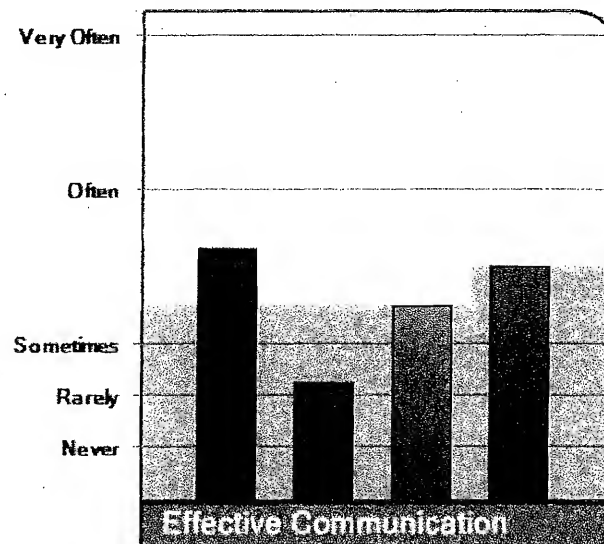
RELATE Institute Findings: In research with couples, the higher the levels of positive family background, the higher the levels of measures of emotional readiness and kindness/flexibility. Family background is also an important part of predicting couples' overall relationship quality.

Effective Communication

The **Effective Communication scale** measures your and your partner's levels of empathy, listening, and ability to send clear messages.

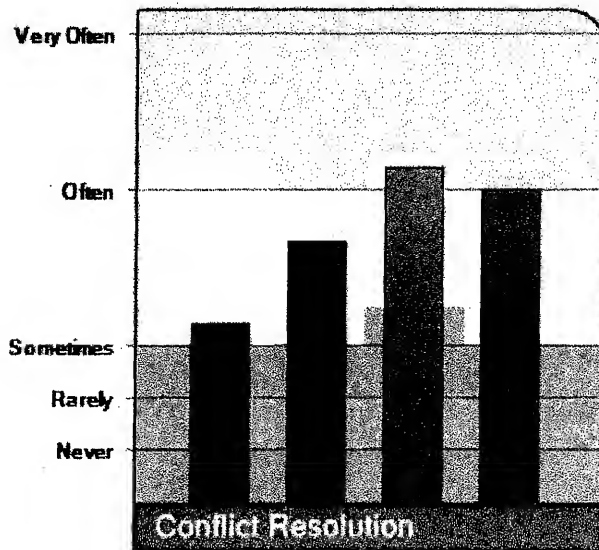
Strength Area (Green): People who score in the green area of this scale see themselves and/or their partners as being high in empathy, listening, and in sending clear messages.

Challenge Area (Red): People who have effective communication scores in the red area are more likely to be in relationships that are less satisfying. People rating themselves and/or their partners in the challenge area on this scale may want to evaluate their ways of interacting to see how they can increase empathy and understanding between partners, and how they can send and receive the communication of needs, concerns, and desires more effectively.



RELATE Institute Findings: In research with couples, higher levels of effective communication have been shown to be associated with higher relationship quality.

Conflict Resolution



The **Conflict Resolution scale** is a measure of the degree of criticism, defensiveness, contempt, and emotional flooding that people use when they are trying to resolve conflict.

Strength Area (Green): People who score in the green area on this scale see themselves and their partners as rarely using criticism and defensiveness when resolving conflict and hence they are less likely to be emotionally flooded.

Challenge Area (Red): People who have conflict resolution scores in the red area are much more likely to be in a relationship that is less satisfying. High levels of criticism and contempt are usually indicative of serious relationship problems that are not likely to be resolved on their own.

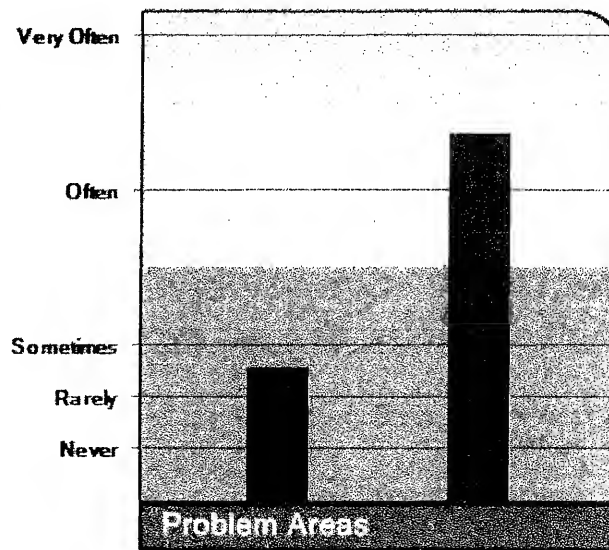
RELATE Institute Findings: High scores on the conflict resolution scale are related to fewer relationship problems, higher relationship stability, and higher levels of satisfaction. Low scores on this scale are strongly related to high hostility in relationships.

Problem Areas

The **Problem Areas scale** is a measure of how often certain key areas have been a problem in your relationship. The areas reported on include: financial matters, communication, having and rearing children, sexuality, parents, roles (who does what), weight, who's in charge, time spent together, and substance abuse.

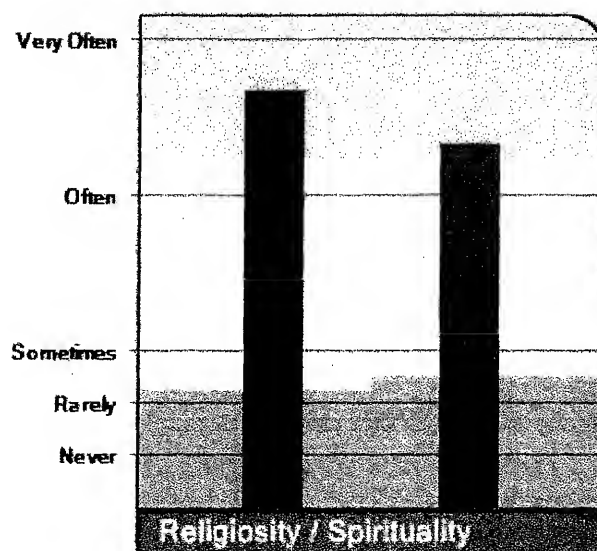
Strength Area (Green): People who score in the green area on this scale see relatively low levels of problems in the relationship. They tend to feel that they and their partner are able to deal with differences in the relationship.

Challenge Area (Red): People who score in the red area on the problem checklist report a high level of problems across a number of areas in their relationship. If problems are occurring frequently in areas that are personally important, a red score on this scale may indicate areas that need change and improvement.



RELATE Institute Findings: Research has shown that the overall problem checklist rating is strongly related to marital satisfaction and marital commitment. Some couples may have a low overall score, but still have one or two areas of frequent problems. It is important to note that couples with relatively low problem ratings do not necessarily have less troubles or difficulties than other couples; rather they are able to manage the differences in their relationship in ways that maintain a sense of partnership and unity.

Religiosity / Spirituality



The **Religiosity / Spirituality scale** is a measure of the importance of religion and spirituality in your lives. life.

Strength Area (Green): People who score in the green area on this scale see themselves as highly religious and spiritual. They are likely to be regularly engaged with a religious community.

Challenge Area (Red): People who score in the red area are less likely to access the resources of a religious community. They are less likely to find peace and meaning in spiritual practices. It is important that couples discuss the role of religiosity and spirituality in their lives.

RELATE Institute Findings: Research has shown that religiosity is strongly related to marital satisfaction and marital commitment. Highly religious young adults have values and attitudes more likely to lead to high marital satisfaction, as compared to those with no religious affiliation or activity. These findings are particularly true when both the husband and wife are highly religious.

Discussion Questions

- Note differences between how you and your partner perceive yourselves and each other. If the differences are large make note of them for further discussion. When discussing these differences, look at your answers for the RELATE scale items to check if you misinterpreted an item or marked your answer wrong (e.g. marked "rarely" when you meant "often.") If the two of you simply are different on a scale, discuss what the difference means to you and your partner and explore why you disagree.
- On which scales are you most similar?
- On which scales are you least similar?
- How will your strengths serve as a resource for you in your relationship?
- How will you adjust to challenges areas in your relationship?

Remarriage

This is not a remarriage situation for either of you.

Challenges Checklist

Below is a table that lists other important relationship factors. These parts of your relationship are profiled here because years of research have shown each of them to be potential challenges for couples. See the Challenge Checklist Breakdown portion of the Detailed Responses and Specific Results report for a reference chart with a brief summary of the research on each item. Many of these items are personal in nature and represent your attitudes and behaviors in these areas. A check in the red column means that your reported score indicates a "challenge area," whereas a check in the white or green columns indicates a "neutral" or "strength" area for your relationship. Respectfully discuss any check marks below to determine if you feel that this really is a challenge for your relationship. Many of the challenges listed below (e.g., substance abuse, violence in your relationship, infidelity, etc.) are very serious in nature and may require help from professional counselors or others to overcome. Remember, these are only "potential" challenges for your relationship. With hard work, many couples are able to overcome difficulties in their personal lives and are able to develop loving, successful relationships.

Age						
Parents – Divorced			✓	✓		
Parents – Negative Conflict Resolution	✓				✓	
Couple – Negative Conflict Resolution			✓	✓		
Violence In Family Background	✓			✓		
Personal Alcohol Use		✓			✓	
Partner's Alcohol Use		✓			✓	
Personal Drug Use	✓			✓		
Partner's Drug Use	✓			✓		
Personal Use of Violence In Current Relationship	✓		✓	✓		
Personal Use of Sexual Pressure In Current Relationship				✓		
Partner's Use of Violence in Current Relationship	✓			✓		
Partner's Use of Sexual Pressure in Current Relationship	✓					✓
Willingness to Cohabit	✓			✓		
Willingness to Have Extra-marital Affairs	✓					✓
Desire Partner to Change			✓		✓	
Partner Desires Me to Change		✓			✓	
Father's Approval of Relationship	✓				✓	
Mother's Approval of Relationship	✓			✓		

Total Scores

Strength and Challenge Areas in Your Relationship

After reviewing your profile scales and the challenges checklist, we recommend that you evaluate the total number of "strength areas" and "challenge areas" in your relationship. Looking at the total number of these areas highlights the fact that relationships are influenced not only by the presence of certain strengths and challenges, but also by how many of these areas there are in the relationship. As these factors "pile up" on each other they tend to create an overall strengthening or challenging effect on a couple's relationship.

In the table below are the four total "strengths" and "challenges" scores from the couple profile graphs and the challenges checklist. (2 scores for M-2's and 2 scores for F-2's perceptions).

M-2's perception of strengths 13

M-2's perception of challenges 8

F-2's perception of strengths 14

F-2's perception of challenges 4

Interpretation Table

The tables below can help you interpret your total scores. The tables show what percentage of partners reported that they were satisfied with their relationship at each total score level. For example, approximately 90% of partners who reported 3 challenge areas in their relationship said that they were satisfied with their relationship, while only approximately 63% said they were satisfied when they reported nine challenge areas in their relationship.

Strengths

0	5% highly satisfied
1-2	10% highly satisfied
3-4	33% highly satisfied

Challenges

0	100% highly satisfied
1-2	97% highly satisfied
3-4	90% highly satisfied

5-6	62% highly satisfied	5-6	85% highly satisfied
7-8	73% highly satisfied	7-8	71% highly satisfied
9-10	77% highly satisfied	9-10	63% highly satisfied
11-15	92% highly satisfied	11-15	35% highly satisfied
16+	99% highly satisfied	16+	10% highly satisfied

Detailed Responses & Specific Results

COUPLE #2 (M-2 and F-2)

PRETEST



Introduction

Instructions

This resource section of the RELATE Report presents additional information about the scales presented in the other sections of your report. It also provides a scale by scale comparison of you and your partner in four important areas of relationships. Some of these scales were used to calculate your profile scores, while others are presented here as additional information.

This section of your RELATE Report also contains *question tables* for the scales. These tables list the specific responses you and your partner gave to the questions on the RELATE questionnaire. You can use these tables to check how you answered the questions and whether the listed response reflects how you remember answering the question. If there is a discrepancy between what you or your partner intended to answer and what is listed, you can discuss how this changes your interpretation of that graph.

Graph Interpretation

Each graph in this report will have either two or four bars demonstrating the level to which you fit a given scale. The first and last bars will portray how each of you portrays yourselves on a given scale. If there are four bars, the middle two bars portray how each of you sees your partner in the same area. The box below shows what data each bar color represents.

Graph Legend

Bar #1 M-2 describes M-2
Bar #2 M-2 describes F-2
Bar #3 F-2 describes M-2
Bar #4 F-2 describes F-2

Scale Calculation

Couple Profile Scales Identifying the Key Strengths and Challenges of your Relationship

The scales reported in the *Profile Scales* section are different from the other sections in the report in that they were created by combining other scales in the report. The table below lists the scales that were combined to create your couple profile scales. You can look at the items listed for each of these scales to see which questions are used to create that scale.

Kindness/Flexibility	combines the scores on the Kind and Flexible scales
Emotional Readiness	combines the scores on the Happy , Calm , Mature and Esteem scales
Family Background	combines the Family Quality , Parent's Marriage and Influence of Family scales
Effective Communication	combines the Empathy and Clear Sending scales
Conflict Resolution	combines the scores on the Noncritical and Respect scales
Problem Areas	combines reverse scores on the "Relationship Problems" questions
Religiosity/Spirituality	Is calculated using the religiosity/spirituality scale

Calculation of strength and challenge zones

The strength and challenge zones on the couple profile graphs were calculated using a large, national sample of couples in the United States. The cut-off points between zones were determined by comparing scale scores with partners' reports of relationship satisfaction. The cut-off point for the green zone is the level on each scale where 90% or more people reporting that score also reported that they were satisfied with their relationship. The yellow zone is the level where 70% to 89% typically report being highly satisfied and the red zone indicates the level where less than 70% of partners reported being satisfied with their relationship. For example, if the green zone for a scale begins at 4.50 it means that more than 90% of partners who rate themselves or their partner at or above that level also report that they are satisfied with their relationship.

Challenge Checklist

The summaries below briefly explain why certain factors are included in the challenges checklist portion of your couple profile. Each of these factors were included in your couple profile because they have a proven track record as challenges or risk factors for couples who desire to have lifelong, high quality relationships.

Age:

Age at marriage has consistently been found to be highly related to later marital quality (Holman & Linford, 2001). Teenage marriages are considerably less stable than those that take place when couples are in their early to mid-twenties (Glenn & Marquardt, 2000). Holman and his colleagues (2001) have offered the hypothesis that there are curvilinear effects in how age is related to marital quality. Marriages that take place when partners are too young are at risk because the couple may not be mature enough to handle the responsibilities and stresses of marriage. First marriages that occur too far above the mean age for marriage (25 for women and 27 for men) could be problematic as well. The concern here is whether or not these individuals can be flexible enough in their preferred style of living to adjust to another person's needs and preferences.

Age**Parents - Divorced:**

Never before have so many people grown up in homes where both biological parents were not together. Approximately 25% of the adults between the ages of 18 and 44 have parents who divorced (Wallerstein, Lewis, & Blackslee, 2000). Even if separation or divorce occurs when children are very young, there is a significant and ongoing loss that surrounds the break-up of one's parents. The idea that divorce can occur without serious negative consequences to family members is a fallacy. Yet, many if not most people who have gone through the experience of a parental divorce do find ways to overcome these traumatic experiences and lead happy, fulfilling lives. The key for your current relationship is to evaluate how a parental divorce has influenced your attitudes and commitment level to marriage (Amato, 2000). People who have divorced parents have been shown to more frequently have poorer relationships with their parents and to not place as much importance on marriage as those whose parents are still together. Resolving anger or disappointment toward one or both parents who divorced can help adults improve their relationships.

Years lived with a divorced parent

	M-2	F-2
One-parent because of divorce.	4 to 6 Years	0 Years

Negative Conflict Resolution:

Of all the different preferences a person brings to a relationship, perhaps the most important preferences are about how conflict is managed. During those serious arguments that nearly all couples have, deep injuries can be inflicted and long-term trouble can develop, or problems can be addressed and the relationship can continue to grow. Researchers have found that hostile conflict resolution (e.g., conflict that includes criticism, defensiveness, negative emotions, etc.) is particularly destructive to couple relationships. Any premarital relationship that already has even one partner who has labeled the couple's conflict style as "hostile" should consider the relationship vulnerable to breakup and at risk for much difficulty. Hostility is not likely to spontaneously improve due to marriage, children, or other changes. More likely hostility will lead to violence, higher levels of substance abuse, and relationship dissolution (Busby & Taniguchi, 2000). Couples who are describing their relationship as hostile would be wise to employ professional help.

Parents - Negative Conflict Resolution M-2 F-2

My parents argued often and hotly. There were a lot of insults back and forth, name-never rarely calling, put-downs, and sarcasm. They didn't really listen to what the other was saying, nor did they look at each other very much. One or the other of them could be quite detached and emotionally uninvolved, even though there may have been brief episodes of attack and defensiveness. There were clearly more negatives than positives in their way of handling conflict.

Couple - Negative Conflict Resolution

We argue often and hotly. There are a lot of insults back and forth, name calling, put-downs, and sarcasm. We don't really listen to what the other is saying, nor do we look at each other very much. One of the other of us can be quite detached and emotionally uninvolved, even though there may be brief episodes of attack and defensiveness. There are clearly more negatives than positives in our way of handling conflicts

M-2
Often

F-2
Never

Violence in Family Background:

The presence of violence in someone's background can have a negative impact on their ability to form and maintain a healthy relationships as an adult. This may be because they have developed violent tendencies themselves or because they have been victimized in a way that hinders their ability to open up in intimate ways to others. Research suggests that many people experience violence in their lives while growing up and many who are not victimized by violence have at least witnessed it. What are the effects of this violence? When a child or teenager is physically or sexually abused or is a witness to abuse between family members, the effects can be devastating and long lasting. The most problematic aspect of past violence for current relationships is if violence has become a part of how partners handle current problems. When violent and controlling behaviors become a common approach to relationship problems, it is usually necessary to get assistance from professionals to stay on the path of change and healing.

Violence In Family Background

Considering all of your experiences while growing up in your family, how would you rate the general level of violence in your home?

M-2
There was
NEVER
violence in the
home

F-2
There was
NEVER
violence in
the home

Alcohol and Drug Use:

Substance-related disorders are illnesses that are often difficult to understand. In marriages where substances are abused, the environment is more chaotic, and often more violent. The lowered inhibitions of the substance abusing partner cause her or his behavior to be more toxic to the relationship environment. The most important questions to ask in relationships are: (1) how much alcohol or drug use is comfortable for each member of the couple, and (2) whether the members can control their use.

Personal Alcohol Use Alcohol?	M-2 Sometimes	F-2 Sometimes
Partner's Alcohol Use Alcohol?	M-2 Rarely	F-2 Sometimes
Personal Drug Use Illegal drugs?	M-2 Never	F-2 Never
Partner's Drug Use Illegal drugs?	M-2 Never	F-2 Never

Violence in the Current Relationship:

One particularly troublesome problem that couples might experience is violence in their relationship. Violence can take many forms and may occur very seldom or very often. In some relationships both partners hit one another; in others only one partner uses physical force. Sometimes the violence might include sexual coercion and even rape. In many instances when there are problems with violence there are also problems with alcohol (Busby, 2000). Estimates on violence rates suggest that between 30% and 50% of premarital couples have experienced at least moderate violence (Killian & Busby, 1996). This is alarming because violence tends to increase after marriage. Any couple who has experienced violence prior to marriage should seek professional help and may want to seriously question the viability of their relationship. This is especially the case if there is a partner who is possessive or jealous, who has a history of violence toward others, who has a pattern of substance abuse, or who has strong insecurities and low self-esteem. A partner with some or most of these characteristics is likely to be abusive in the future.

Personal Use of Violence In Current Relationship How often are YOU violent in any of the ways mentioned above toward your current partner?	M-2 Never	F-2 Never
Personal Use of Sexual Pressure In Current Relationship How often has your current partner been pressured against her/his will to participate in sexual behaviors (such as fondling, oral sex, or intercourse) by YOU?	M-2 Very Often	F-2 Never
Partner's Use of Violence in Current Relationship How often is YOUR CURRENT PARTNER violent toward you?	M-2 Never	F-2 Never
Partner's Use of Sexual Pressure in Current Relationship How often have you been pressured against your will to participate in intimate sexual activities (such as fondling, oral sex, or intercourse) by YOUR CURRENT PARTNER?	M-2 Never	F-2 Sometimes

Willingness to Have an Affair:

The social norm for marriage is sexual fidelity. The vast majority of people expect that their marriage will be one of exclusivity and hope that their partner will be sexually faithful in their marriage. A willingness to have an affair after marriage indicates a lack of commitment to the relationship and to the institution of marriage itself. Sexual infidelity has been found to be a serious factor to why many couples do not stay together.

Willingness to Have Extra-marital Affairs

	M-2	F-2
If I am married, I would not have a love affair with someone else.	Strongly Agree	Strongly Disagree

Willingness to Cohabit:

Some couples believe that living together is the best pathway to marriage. In fact, 60% of couples who live together do get married (Frey, Abresch, & Yeasting, 2001). Other researchers have documented that now the majority of couples who marry cohabited at least some time prior to their marriage (Popenoe & Whitehead, 2000). Although cohabitation may be a common experience, the effects of cohabitation on the future success of marriage are clearly negative. Study after study continues to document that cohabitation before marriage increases the chance of divorce and dissatisfaction in marriage. In some studies, cohabitation has been shown to double the chance of divorce (McRae, 1999).

Willingness to Cohabit

	M-2	F-2
Living together is an acceptable alternative to marriage.	Strongly Disagree	Strongly Disagree

Change Partner/Partner Change me:

The question of how much or how little people can or will change is intriguing but likely to remain unanswerable. What seems to be important is having realistic expectations of change for self and partner. The ideal is to be in a relationship in which you feel accepted for who you are and you accept your partner. This is particularly true at the beginning of a relationship because, over time, all relationships will demand change of both people. If you start out in a relationship already thinking that your partner needs to change or feeling that your partner wants you to change, this should be a warning sign to you that serious trouble is likely ahead. As reasonable as this sounds, it is baffling how many people develop and stay in relationships in which they are hoping, emphasizing, and trying to get their partner to make significant changes. Such unrealistic expectations can be quite destructive to relationships. If someone in the relationship wants significant changes in their partner, it is very important to talk about this.

Desire Partner to Change

There are many things about my partner I would like to change.

M-2	F-2
Agree	It Depends

Partner Desires Me to Change

There are many things about me that my partner would like to change.

M-2	F-2
It Depends	It Depends

Four Areas

Scale by Scale Relationship Evaluation

Explanation

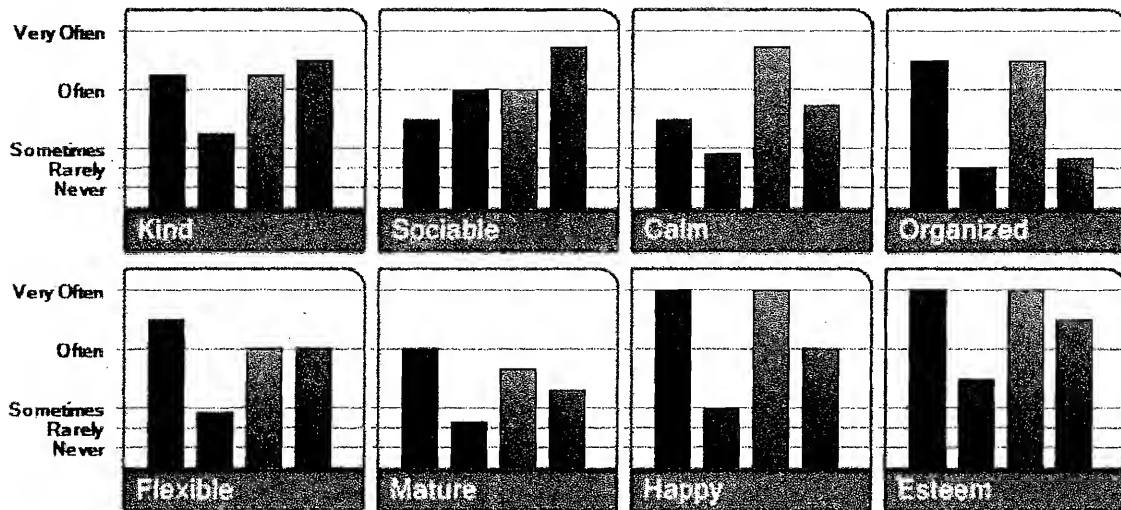
This part of your RELATE Report provides a scale by scale comparison of you and your partner in the following four areas:

- Personality Characteristics
- Values
- Family Background Experiences
- Relationship Experiences

Look at the specific areas where you may have differences or low scores, and discuss their implications for your relationship. A few of these differences may have resulted from errors where you simply interpreted the questions differently. Some of them, however, will identify differences in values and experiences which should be examined together.

Personality Characteristics

The bar graphs below show how each of you rated yourself and your partner on several personality characteristics. Each scale is based on your responses of how much the words describe each of you.



Interpretation Guidelines and Discussion Questions

■ On which personality traits are you most similar? Least similar? How will your personality similarities serve as a resource for you in your relationship? How will you adjust to large differences?

■ Are there specific personality characteristics that were perceived by one of you to be relatively low? If yes, what does this mean for you and your partner? Do these scores indicate an area where personal growth may be needed? Respectfully discuss with your partner any changes that both of you can make to strengthen your relationship. Remember, loving and supportive feedback is much more helpful than criticism or complaining.

Personality Characteristics Scales tables

	M-2 describes	M-2 describes	F-2 describes	F-2 describes
Kind	M-2	F-2	M-2	F-2
Considerate	Often	Sometimes	Often	Often
Loving	Often	Sometimes	Often	Often
Kind	Often	Sometimes	Often	Very Often
Friendly	Very Often	Often	Very Often	Very Often

	M-2 describes	M-2 describes	F-2 describes	F-2 describes
Sociable	M-2	F-2	M-2	F-2
Talkative	Often	Often	Often	Very Often
Quiet	Sometimes	Rarely	Rarely	Rarely
Shy	Sometimes	Rarely	Sometimes	Never
Outgoing	Often	Often	Very Often	Very Often

	M-2 describes	M-2 describes	F-2 describes	F-2 describes
Calm	M-2	F-2	M-2	F-2
Worrier	Sometimes	Often	Never	Sometimes
Fearful	Rarely	Often	Never	Rarely
Tense	Rarely	Sometimes	Rarely	Sometimes
Nervous	Sometimes	Rarely	Never	Never

	M-2 describes	M-2 describes	F-2 describes	F-2 describes
Organized	M-2	F-2	M-2	F-2
Organized	Very Often	Rarely	Very Often	Sometimes
Messy	Rarely	Often	Rarely	Often

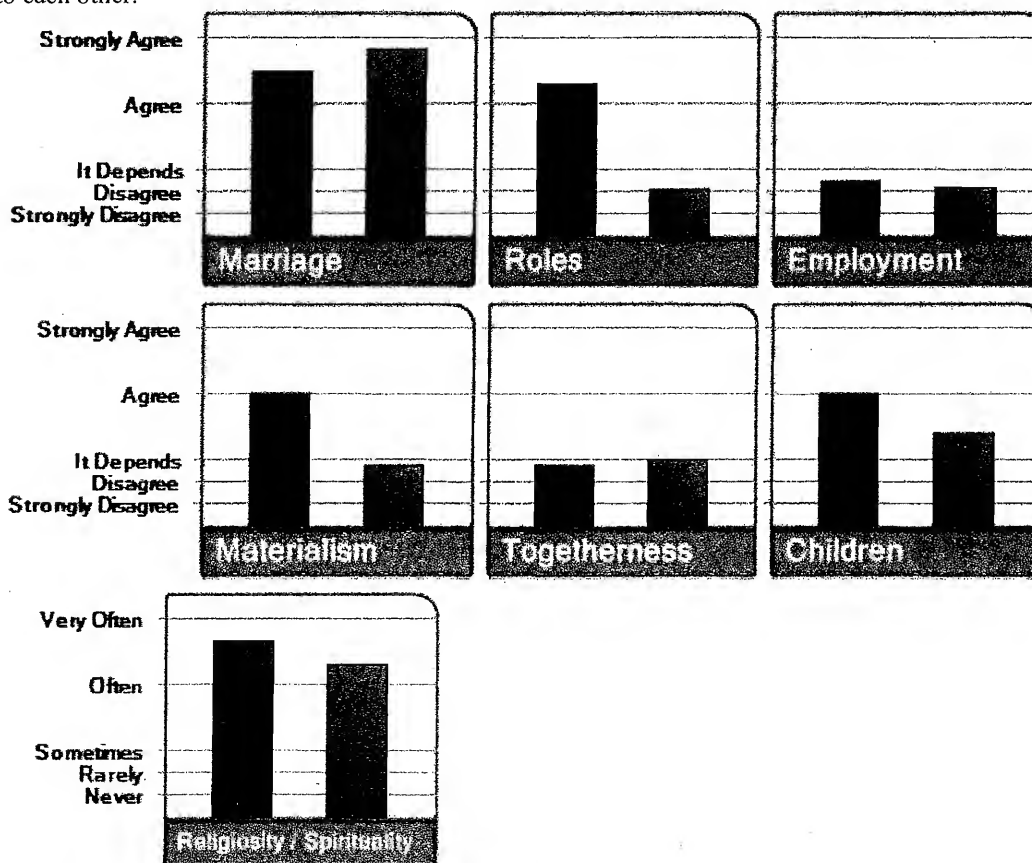
	M-2 describes	M-2 describes	F-2 describes	F-2 describes
Flexible	M-2	F-2	M-2	F-2
Open minded	Very Often	Sometimes	Often	Sometimes
Flexible	Often	Sometimes	Often	Very Often
Easy going	Often	Sometimes	Very Often	Often
Adaptable	Very Often	Rarely	Sometimes	Often

	M-2	M-2	F-2	F-2
	describes	describes	describes	describes
Mature	M-2	F-2	M-2	F-2
Fight with others/lose temper	Never	Often	Rarely	Sometimes
Act immature	Rarely	Sometimes	Sometimes	Rarely
Easily irritated or mad	Sometimes	Often	Rarely	Sometimes
	M-2	M-2	F-2	F-2
	describes	describes	describes	describes
Happy	M-2	F-2	M-2	F-2
Sad and blue	Never	Sometimes	Never	Rarely
Feel hopeless	Never	Rarely	Never	Rarely
Depressed	Never	Often	Never	Rarely
	M-2	M-2	F-2	F-2
	describes	describes	describes	describes
Esteem	M-2	F-2	M-2	F-2
I take a positive attitude toward myself.	Very Often	Rarely	Very Often	Often
I think I am no good at all.	Never	Rarely	Never	Never
I feel I am a person of worth.	Very Often	Often	Very Often	Often
I am inclined to think I am a failure.	Never	Rarely	Never	Never

Values

Values are the basic beliefs that help a person determine his or her life goals, interests, and behavior.

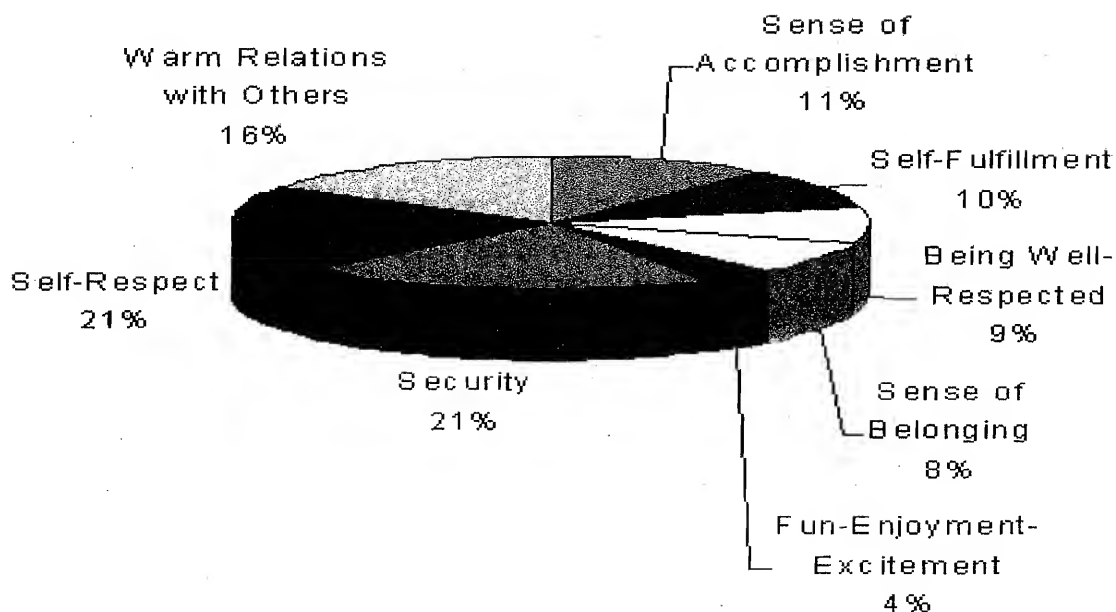
Values are beliefs that are deeply important to us. Research has shown that having similar values is helpful in achieving a satisfying relationship. The bar graph below shows how much each of you agrees or disagrees on general values or attitudes, based on the specific items in RELATE. The higher the score, the more each of you values that particular belief. The closer the heights of the bars, the more similar you are to each other.



Interpretation Guidelines and Discussion Questions

Discuss the areas where you are most similar and most different. How will you adjust or resolve your differences? Which values are most important to each of you? Why? Value differences can be dealt with effectively by compromising and collaborating. This requires good communication skills and a caring attitude.

Most Important Value



What is the ONE thing listed that is MOST important to YOU?

M-2
Being well-
respected

F-2
Fun-
enjoyment-
excitement

Choosing BEING WELL-RESPECTED as a value orientation is often associated with desire to please others and to be approved by others. Those who choose this value may feel somewhat apprehensive about the future because they may perceive a lack of control in their lives.

People who choose FUN-ENJOYMENT-EXCITEMENT are often more creative and unconventional in solving problems. They are prone to be independent, strong-willed, self-sufficient, and not overly concerned with what others think about them. They are more likely to focus on the pleasures of life, which helps them to avoid being overwhelmed by life's adversities.

Values Scales tables

Marriage

It is perfectly normal never to want to get married.

Being married is among the one or two most important things in life.

If I had an unhappy marriage and neither counseling nor other actions helped, my spouse and I would be better off if we divorced.

Once I make the choice to marry, divorce is never an option.

Marriage involves a covenant with God, not just a legal contract recognized by the law

M-2
Agree
Strongly Agree

Strongly
Disagree

Strongly Agree
Strongly Agree

F-2
Disagree
Strongly Agree

Strongly
Disagree

Strongly Agree
Strongly Agree

Living together is an acceptable alternative to marriage.	Strongly Disagree	Strongly Disagree
Roles		
I do not like the idea that husbands and wives can specialize in different household responsibilities.	Strongly Disagree	It Depends
A husband should help out some with the housework, but a wife should organize what needs to be done and when.	It Depends	Disagree
Mothers have more natural ability than fathers in relating to infants and toddlers.	Strongly Agree	Strongly Disagree
The father should spend as much time as the mother caring for infants and toddlers.	Disagree	Agree
If a husband and wife disagree about something important, the wife should give in to her husband because he is the main leader of the family.	Strongly Agree	It Depends
Husbands and wives should discuss important decisions and reach an agreement they both like before taking action.	Disagree	Agree
Employment		
In my marriage it would not bother me if the wife earned more income than the husband.	Strongly Agree	Strongly Agree
It would be an acceptable arrangement for the husband to stay home to care for young children while the wife earns the paycheck.	Agree	It Depends
The husband's and children's needs should come before a job or career for a wife.	Agree	Agree
A mother should feel free to pursue a career or job even when there are preschool age children in the home.	It Depends	Strongly Agree
Materialism		
Money may not buy happiness in a family, but it sure doesn't hurt.	It Depends	Disagree
It is important to me that my family has the finer things in life.	Strongly Agree	Agree
Having money and lots of things has never been important to me.	Disagree	It Depends
I plan to earn an income that makes my family financially well off.	Strongly Agree	Disagree
Husbands and wives should both carefully look for bargains before buying something they want.	It Depends	It Depends
Togetherness		
It creates problems for spouses if they go for a few days without spending much time together as a couple.	It Depends	Strongly Agree
In marriage, having time alone is more important than togetherness.	Agree	Agree
Married couples do not need to share many of the same recreational interests or hobbies with each other.	Disagree	Disagree
It is important for a husband and wife to have many of the same friends, and to like each other's friends.	Disagree	Strongly Disagree

Children

M-2

F-2

One of the main reasons to get married is to have children.	Strongly Agree	Agree
Using artificial or chemical birth control methods (the pill, spermicide, condom, etc.) is acceptable in marriage.	It Depends	Agree
Permanent birth control through surgical operation for either husband or wife is acceptable if my spouse and I decided to have no more children.	It Depends	Agree
Legal abortion is an acceptable method of preventing an undesirable birth.	Strongly Disagree	Strongly Disagree
A couple should delay having children until other important issues are worked out first.	Disagree	Disagree

Religiosity / Spirituality

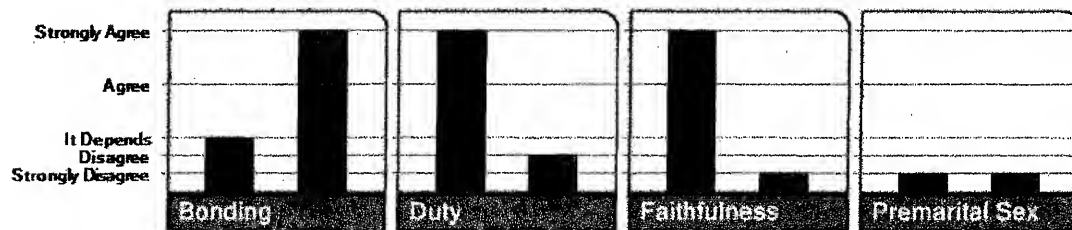
Spirituality is an important part of my life.	Very Often	Very Often
How often do you pray (commune with a higher power)?	Often	Often
Some doctrines or practices of my church (or religious body) are hard for me to accept.	Never	Rarely

Lifestyle Factors table

The table below shows some additional information about certain lifestyle factors for each of you. Evaluate how the two of you compare on these items and discuss how any similarities or differences will influence your relationship. Discuss how these lifestyle factors influence your relationship now and how they will in the future.

Other Items	M-2	F-2
Age		
Alcohol?	Sometimes	Sometimes
Illegal drugs?	Never	Never
Your sexual preference is:	Heterosexual (opposite sex)	Heterosexual (opposite sex)
How much education have you completed?	Bachelor's degree	Graduate or professional degree, not completed
Your current personal yearly gross income before taxes & deductions:	\$30,000-39,999	\$30,000-39,999
Your race or ethnic group is:	Other (please specify)	African (Black)
Your religious affiliation is:	Other (please specify)	Protestant (Methodist, Lutheran, Episcopalian, Baptist, etc.)
How often do you attend religious services?	Weekly	Weekly
How often do you desire to have sexual intercourse with your partner?	5 to 7 times a week	1 to 3 times a month
I most prefer to have ___ children during my lifetime.	Three	Two

Sexual Values Chart



The graphs above show your responses to four questions dealing with sexual values. Below are explanations of the bars found on the graph.

"Bonding" refers to the question regarding the importance of sexual intercourse as a bonding experience in marriage. A high score here shows that you think sexual intercourse enhances feelings of emotional and physical closeness with your partner.

"Duty" refers to the question of how much you view sexual intercourse as a duty as much as a source of personal pleasure. A high score on this item suggests a more negative attitude about sex, or seeing it as less important for creating feelings of bonding in the relationship.

"Faithfulness" measures the extent to which you believe in fidelity or faithfulness in marriage. A high score would show that you think being faithful to a spouse is very important and that you would not have a love affair with someone else.

"Premarital Sex" refers to how much you agree that as long as there is a committed relationship, sexual intercourse is acceptable before marriage. A high score would show that you think premarital sexual relations are acceptable.

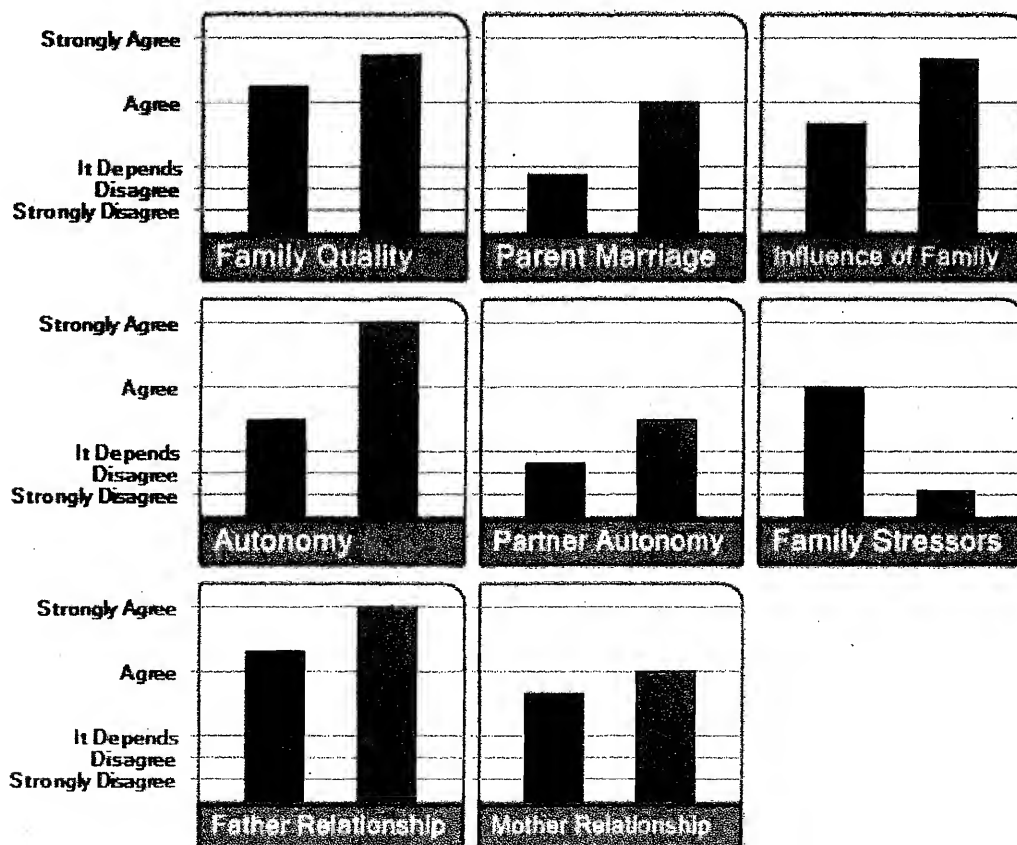
Interpretation Guidelines and Discussion Questions

Discuss the extent to which you as a couple agree or disagree with the statements listed above. If there is much disagreement, explain your points of view on the value of sex in your marriage. Listen respectfully to each other. How will you adjust to or resolve your differences of opinion? Remember that compromising may be necessary.

Family Background

The scales in the graphs below show a comparison of your perceptions of your family background experiences. For all of the scales in this section, higher scores indicate that your experiences with your families (e.g., relationships with parents, etc.) are generally better than those who have low scores.

The last scale on the graph ("family stressors") focuses on a number of stressful situations sometimes experienced by families. Higher scores on this scale indicate that a greater number of stressors occurred in your family.



Interpretation Guidelines and Discussion Questions

- Discuss each family background scale and how you think it has affected you as an adult. How may this factor be affecting you or your relationship as a couple now? For example, if you rate your family's processes as largely negative (e.g., having an unloving atmosphere), how might this affect your view of marriage and family life and your current relationship?
- For bar graphs that are very low refer to how you answered each individual question to better determine why the score is so low. For scales with very low scores, set goals on how to improve your family relationships, if possible. For example, if you rated your father-child relationship as poor, what can you do to improve it now?
- Discuss the stressors that occurred to your family while growing up. Discuss how these stressors and your family's type of reaction (e.g. denial, quick resolution of the crisis, etc.) affected you as a child and affect you now as an adult. How have these stressors affected your attitudes about marriage and family life? Are you more or less confident that you can handle future life stressors as an individual or a couple? Why?

Family Background scales tables**Family Quality**

From what I experienced in my family, I think family relationships are safe, secure, rewarding, worth being in, and a source of comfort.

M-2
Strongly
Agree

F-2
Strongly
Agree

From what I experienced in my family, I think family relationships are confusing, unfair, anxiety-provoking, inconsistent, and unpredictable.

Disagree

Strongly
Disagree

We had a loving atmosphere in our family.

Agree

Agree

All things considered, my childhood years were happy.

Agree

Strongly
Agree

Parent Marriage

M-2

F-2

My father was happy in his marriage.

Agree

Agree

My mother was happy in her marriage.

Disagree

Agree

I would like my marriage to be like my parents' marriage.

Disagree

Agree

Father Relationship

M-2

F-2

My father showed physical affection to me by appropriate hugging and/or kissing.

Strongly
Agree

Strongly
Agree

My father participated in enjoyable activities with me.

Agree

Strongly
Agree

My father and I were able to share our feelings on just about any topic without embarrassment or fear of hurt feelings.

Agree

Strongly
Agree

Mother Relationship

M-2

F-2

My mother showed physical affection to me by appropriate hugging and/or kissing.

Strongly
Agree

Agree

My mother participated in enjoyable activities with me.

Agree

Agree

My mother and I were able to share our feelings on just about any topic without embarrassment or fear of hurt feelings.

Disagree

Agree

Influence of Family

M-2

F-2

There are matters from my family experience that I'm still having trouble dealing with or coming to terms with.

It Depends

Strongly
Disagree

There are matters from my family experience that negatively affect my ability to form close relationships.

Disagree

Strongly
Disagree

I feel at peace about anything negative that happened to me in the family in which I grew up.

Agree

Agree

Autonomy

M-2

F-2

My parents currently encourage me to be independent and to make my own decisions.

It Depends

Strongly
Agree

My parents currently try to run my life.

Disagree

Strongly
Disagree

Partner Autonomy

M-2

F-2

My partner's parents encourage him/her to be independent and make his/her own decisions.

Sometimes

Rarely

My partner's parents try to run his/her life.	Often	Never
Family Stressors	M-2	F-2
There were family members who experienced emotional problems such as: severe depression, anxiety attacks, eating disorders, or other mental/emotional problems.	Sometimes	Never
There were financial strains such as loss of jobs, bankruptcy, large debts, or going on welfare.	Often	Rarely
There were physical strains such as a member(s) being physically handicapped, hospitalized for a serious physical illness or injury, or becoming premaritally pregnant.	Often	Never
There were one or more family members who struggled with addictions to alcohol or other drugs.	Very Often	Never

Additional Family Background Factors table

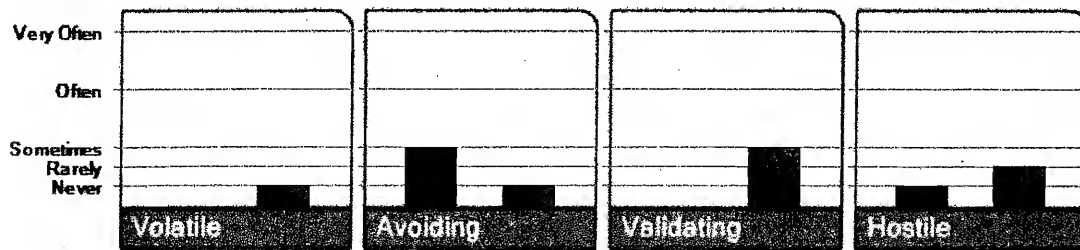
The table below contains some information about other family background factors. Evaluate how these factors contributed to your experiences as a child and adolescent while growing up and how they influence you now.

Other Family Background Factors	M-2	F-2
One-parent because of divorce.	4 to 6 Years	0 Years
One-parent because a parent had died.	0 Years	0 Years
Both biological parents.	10 to 12 Years	18 Years
A parent and a step parent because parents had divorced.	0 Years	0 Years
A parent and a step parent because a parent had died.	0 Years	0 Years
A foster family.	0 Years	0 Years
An adoptive family.	0 Years	0 Years
A relative (grandparent, uncle, aunt, etc.)	0 Years	0 Years
Please tell us whom you have in mind as you answer questions about your family	relatives	Biological parents and biological siblings
Please tell us whom you will have in mind as you answer questions about your mother	Biological mother	Biological mother
Please tell us whom you will have in mind as you answer questions about your father.	Biological father	Biological father
What is your father's current yearly gross income before taxes and deductions?	None	\$50,000-74,999
What is your mother's current yearly gross income before taxes and deductions?	\$50,000-74,999	\$50,000-74,999
How much education has your father completed?	Some college, not Bachelor's degree	currently enrolled
How much education has your mother completed?	Bachelor's degree	
	Graduate or professional degree, completed	

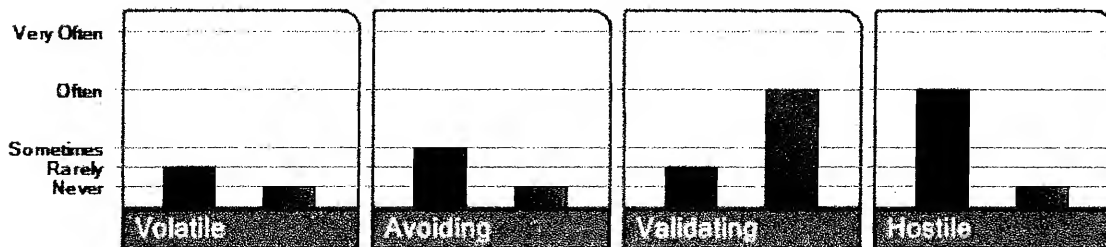
Marital Conflict Resolution Types

The graphs below are based on how you and your partner evaluated your parents' styles of handling conflict, as well as your own styles of handling conflict. A higher score for each of these items signifies that you perceive yours and your parents' styles of dealing with conflict as being like that particular pattern. If you have similar scores all the way across the graph, you may not have one predominant way of dealing with disagreements. Following the graphs are some characteristics that describe each of the four patterns of handling conflict.

Parental Conflict Resolution



Couple Conflict Resolution



VOLATILE couples generally have arguments which are fought on a grand scale, often trying to persuade each other to their points of view. Although they argue hotly, they have an even better time making up, and are still usually able to resolve their differences. In fact, their conflicts are just a small part of a warm and loving relationship, since they have a lot of affection, laughing, and zest for life.

AVOIDANT couples tend to be conflict minimizers. They would rather make light of their differences than spend time and energy arguing to resolve them. They think it is better to "agree to disagree" since open conflict and anger does not seem to get them anywhere. These couples resolve issues by letting time take its course, or minimizing them. They often think that the good companionship and sharing in their marriage is so important that they can overlook disagreements.

VALIDATING couples generally show each other, even in the midst of disagreements, that they value each other and recognize the worth of their opinions and emotions, even if they do not agree with that opinion. They usually display self-control, being able to remain calm while they listen to the other, and then good-naturedly try to persuade the other or negotiate a compromise. They often value and

share similar interests, activities, and their sense of being a couple over individual goals and desires.

HOSTILE couples argue often and hotly, using insults, put-downs and sarcasm in their discussions. During conflict they often do not look at each other or listen to what is being said, and often one or the other of them may be detached and emotionally uninvolved. Criticism, contempt for each other (such as sarcastic remarks), defensiveness, and ignoring one another may be typical of these couples' conflict styles. The relationships for these couples often are more negative than positive.

Interpretation Guidelines and Discussion Questions

- Discuss and compare how your parents and your partner's parents dealt with marital conflicts. Research shows that couples can be happily married using any of the first 3 methods of conflict resolution - volatile, avoidant, or validating. However, marital dissatisfaction and separation are

often associated with couples using the fourth style, hostile. If your parents were hostile in their style, discuss how that affected you as a child. How does it affect you now?

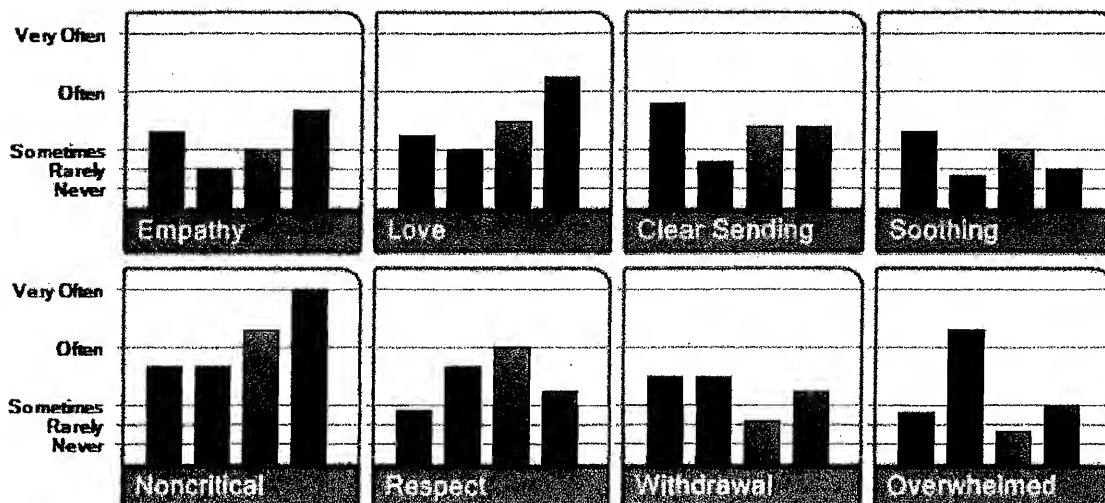
- Which style are you most like as a couple? How much do you and your partner agree on your style? What does this mean to you? Which style do you value most? What can you do to change to that style, if desired?

- Set goals for improvement if you perceive your styles as different, or if hostility is the common method for one or both of you. What style do you want to use as a couple? What are the resources to help you evolve into that style? Professional therapy may be necessary.

Relationship Experiences

Couple Communication Styles

Communication is important for relationships, but there are many ways to communicate, and couples often develop their own styles of communicating. Below is a graph showing your evaluations of how you communicate as a couple. Similar to the Personality Characteristics section, each scale is based on the responses of how often you are like the statement in the RELATE questionnaire.



Interpretation Guidelines and Discussion Questions

■ People who rate themselves and their partners as high on empathy, sending clear messages, expressing love, etc. tend to have more satisfying relationships. Which communication styles above are your strengths or weaknesses? Which do you need to improve?

■ Note differences between how you perceive yourself and how your partner perceives you. If the differences are large, make note of them for further discussion. When discussing these differences, be sure to look at the RELATE items that you used to determine scores on each scale to check to see if you misinterpreted an item or marked your answer wrong. If the two of you simply are different on a scale, discuss what the difference means to you and your partner and explore why you think you disagree on perceptions.

■ Note that 3 communication styles in particular - having low scores on NONCRITICAL, RESPECT, and WITHDRAWAL - are especially harmful to relationship satisfaction.

Relationship Experiences tables

	M-2 describes M-2	M-2 describes F-2	F-2 describes M-2	F-2 describes F-2
Empathy				
In most matters, I understand what my partner is trying to say.	Sometimes	Rarely	Sometimes	Sometimes
I understand my partner's feelings.	Rarely	Rarely	Sometimes	Often
I am able to listen to my partner in an understanding way.	Very Often	Rarely	Sometimes	Often

	M-2 describes M-2	M-2 describes F-2	F-2 describes M-2	F-2 describes F-2
Love				
I include my partner in my life.	Sometimes	Rarely	Sometimes	Often
I find my partner physically attractive	Often	Often	Very Often	Often
I admire my partner.	Sometimes	Often	Rarely	Often
I show a lot of love toward my partner.	Often	Sometimes	Sometimes	Often
Clear Sending				
When I talk to my partner I can say what I want in a clear manner.	Very Often	Sometimes	Often	Sometimes
I struggle to find words to express myself to my partner.	Often	Sometimes	Rarely	Sometimes
I sit down with my partner and just talk things over.	Often	Rarely	Sometimes	Often
I talk over pleasant things that happen during the day when I am with my partner.	Often	Rarely	Sometimes	Often
I discuss my personal problems with my partner.	Often	Rarely	Sometimes	Sometimes
Soothing				
When I am in an argument, I recognize when I am overwhelmed and then make a deliberate effort to calm myself down	Often	Sometimes	Often	Sometimes
While in an argument, I recognize when my partner is overwhelmed and then make a deliberate effort to calm him/her down.	Sometimes	Never	Rarely	Never
I've found that during an intense argument it is better to take a break, calm down, then return to discuss it later.	Sometimes	Never	Sometimes	Rarely

	M-2 describes M-2	M-2 describes F-2	F-2 describes M-2	F-2 describes F-2
Noncritical				
I don't censor my complaints at all. I really let my partner have it full force.	Sometimes	Rarely	Sometimes	Never
I use a tactless choice of words when I complain.	Sometimes	Rarely	Never	Never
There's no stopping me once I get started complaining.	Never	Sometimes	Never	Never
	M-2 describes M-2	M-2 describes F-2	F-2 describes M-2	F-2 describes F-2
Respect				
I have no respect for my partner when we are discussing an issue.	Rarely	Rarely	Never	Never
When I get upset I can see glaring faults in my partner's personality.	Often	Sometimes	Sometimes	Sometimes
When my partner complains, I feel that I have to "ward off" these attacks.	Often	Rarely	Rarely	Sometimes
I feel unfairly attacked when my partner is being negative.	Sometimes		Rarely	Often
	M-2 describes M-2	M-2 describes F-2	F-2 describes M-2	F-2 describes F-2
Withdrawal				
I think, "It's best to withdraw to avoid a big fight."	Often	Often	Sometimes	Sometimes
I think that withdrawing is the best solution.	Often	Sometimes	Sometimes	Sometimes
I don't want to fan the flames of conflict, so I just sit back and wait.	Sometimes	Very Often	Rarely	Often
I withdraw to try to calm down.	Sometimes	Rarely	Never	Sometimes
	M-2 describes M-2	M-2 describes F-2	F-2 describes M-2	F-2 describes F-2
Overwhelmed				
Whenever I have a conflict with my partner, I feel physically tense and anxious, and I don't think clearly.	Sometimes	Often	Never	Sometimes
I feel physically tired or drained after I have an argument with	Rarely	Very Often	Sometimes	Sometimes

my partner.

Whenever we have a conflict,
the feelings I have are
overwhelming.

Sometimes

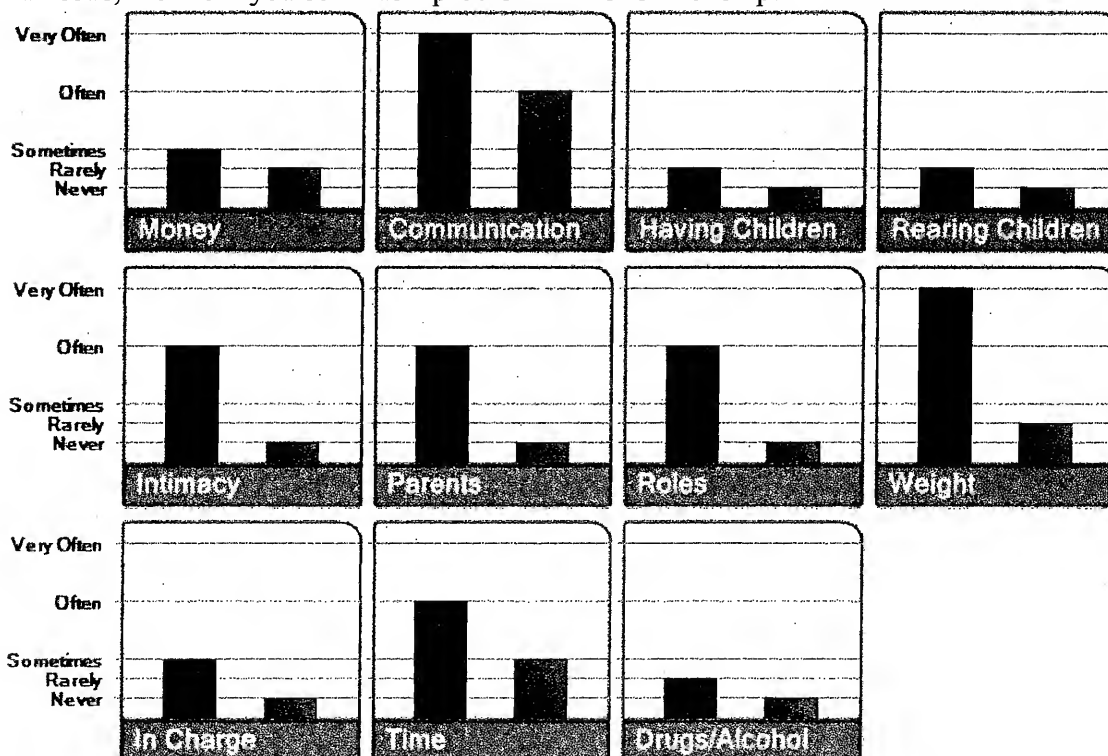
Often

Never

Sometimes

Relationship Problems

The graphs below show your answers to the question of how often you think each of these issues have been a problem for you in your relationship. The higher your score for that issue, the more you see it as a problem in the relationship.

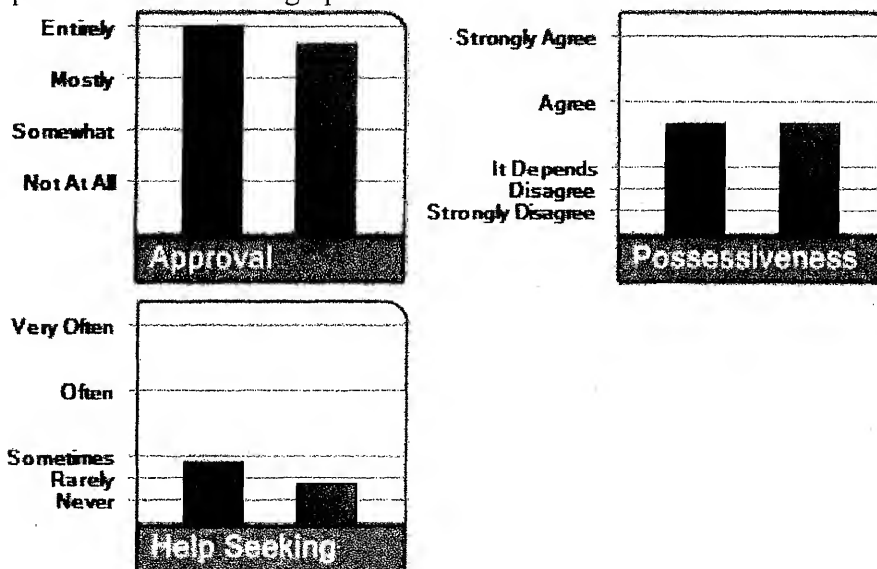


Interpretation Guidelines and Discussion Questions

Note the topics you or your partner scored 2 (sometimes) or higher on the graph. These are the problems you should discuss. How different or similar are you on your ratings of the problem areas? What is your plan on how to resolve these problems?

Relationship Dynamics

The graph below summarizes your perceptions of three important relationship dynamics: Others' approval of your relationship, possessiveness, and whether you seek help outside your relationship for solving problems. Both partners' evaluations of these factors in your relationship are included on the graph.



Interpretation Guidelines and Discussion Questions

- Approval of your relationship by significant others such as friends and family can be related to relationship satisfaction. How much do others approve of your relationship? How much do you both agree or disagree on this? Why?
- People who rate their partners as possessive often resent it and report lower relationship satisfaction. How did you and your partner rate each other? What does this mean to you?
- On the help-seeking graph, how do your scores compare? Discuss your differences or similarities and decide on what is a comfortable method for seeking help on solving problems on which you can both agree.

Relationship Dynamics tables**Approval**

	M-2	F-2
Your father	Entirely	Mostly
Your mother	Entirely	Entirely
Your friends	Entirely	Entirely

Possessiveness

	M-2	F-2
I don't like it when my partner does things without me.	It Depends	Agree
It is important that my partner only confides in me.	Agree	It Depends
I think my partner spends too much time with family and friends.	Agree	Agree

Help Seeking

	M-2	F-2
I share my feelings and concerns about my relationship with family members.	Often	Rarely
I seek help and advice from my friends for problems in our relationship.	Never	Rarely
I seek help and advice from a professional counselor/clergy for problems we have in our relationship.	Often	Never
I keep our relationship problems just between the two of us.	Often	Often

Additional Relationship Factors table

The table below contains information about other factors in your relationship. Evaluate your similarities and differences on these factors and discuss how they are influencing your relationship.

Relationship and Partner

	M-2	F-2
Which best describes your current marital status?	Single, never married.	Single, never married.
How many times have you been divorced?	None	None
Which best describes your current dating status?	Engaged, or committed to marry	Engaged, or committed to marry
What is your relationship to the person about whom you will answer the "partner" questions below?	I am engaged or committed to marriage to her/him.	I am engaged or committed to marriage to her/him.
How long have you and your partner been dating (If married, how long have you and your partner been married)?	3 to 5 years	3 to 5 years
How long will it be from now until you and your partner marry?	Less than 3 months.	Less than 3 months.

In some relationships children are present premaritally.
Which statement best
describes your current situation?

In your relationship, who is moving faster toward marriage?

About how often do you currently have sex with your
partner?

Alcohol?
Illegal drugs?

We are currently
unmarried, and
none of the above
situations apply to
us.

My partner wants
to get married a
little more than I
do.

Never, because
one or both of us
believe in
abstinence.

Rarely
Never

We are currently
unmarried, and
none of the above
situations apply to
us.

I want to get
married a little
more than my
partner.

Never, because
one or both of us
believe in
abstinence.

Sometimes
Never

APPENDIX D

NEWSPAPER ARTICLE

December 10, 2005 – December 16, 2005 The Baltimore Afro-American

MINISTRY NURTURES NEWLYWEDS

By H. Allen Hurst
AFRO Staff Writer

On a recent Sunday morning, the Rev. Frances "Toni" Draper, pastor of East Baltimore's John Wesley AME Zion Church held a special consecration service for ten recently married couples.

The guest speaker was the Rt. Rev. Vashti M. McKenzie, presiding prelate of the 13th Episcopal District of the AME Church.

Using the tenets of the Bible, the pastor has been offering premarital counseling aimed at helping couples deal with the stresses of marriage and maintain a happy, successful marriage.

"It's important to have a Marriage Ministry, because God honors marriage," said Draper.

"We try to help couples understand what it means to have a biblical marriage. The divorce rate among Christians is astronomical."

Draper said all couples, whether Christian or not, face the same problems. "Most marital problems revolve around communication, conflict resolution, financial management, and issues of trust," she said.

According to Draper, couples in strong marriages have many residual benefits.

"Children do better in school and are healthier emotionally, when their parents' marriage is working well," said Draper.

Bishop McKenzie gave a well-received sermon on spiritual resiliency and responsibility that comes with accepting the truth of God.

"Our theme for today is 'Do You See What I See?'" said McKenzie. "When blinded by problems some fail to see the blessings in front of them."

At the conclusion of the sermon, McKenzie offered a prayer for the newlyweds, well as the many other married couples in the congregation.



Marcus and Shalan Gaddy McLain were married Nov. 12.



Moses and Kaia Franklin Stevens were married Oct. 22.



Gregory and Zorita McNeil Austin were married Sept. 18.

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